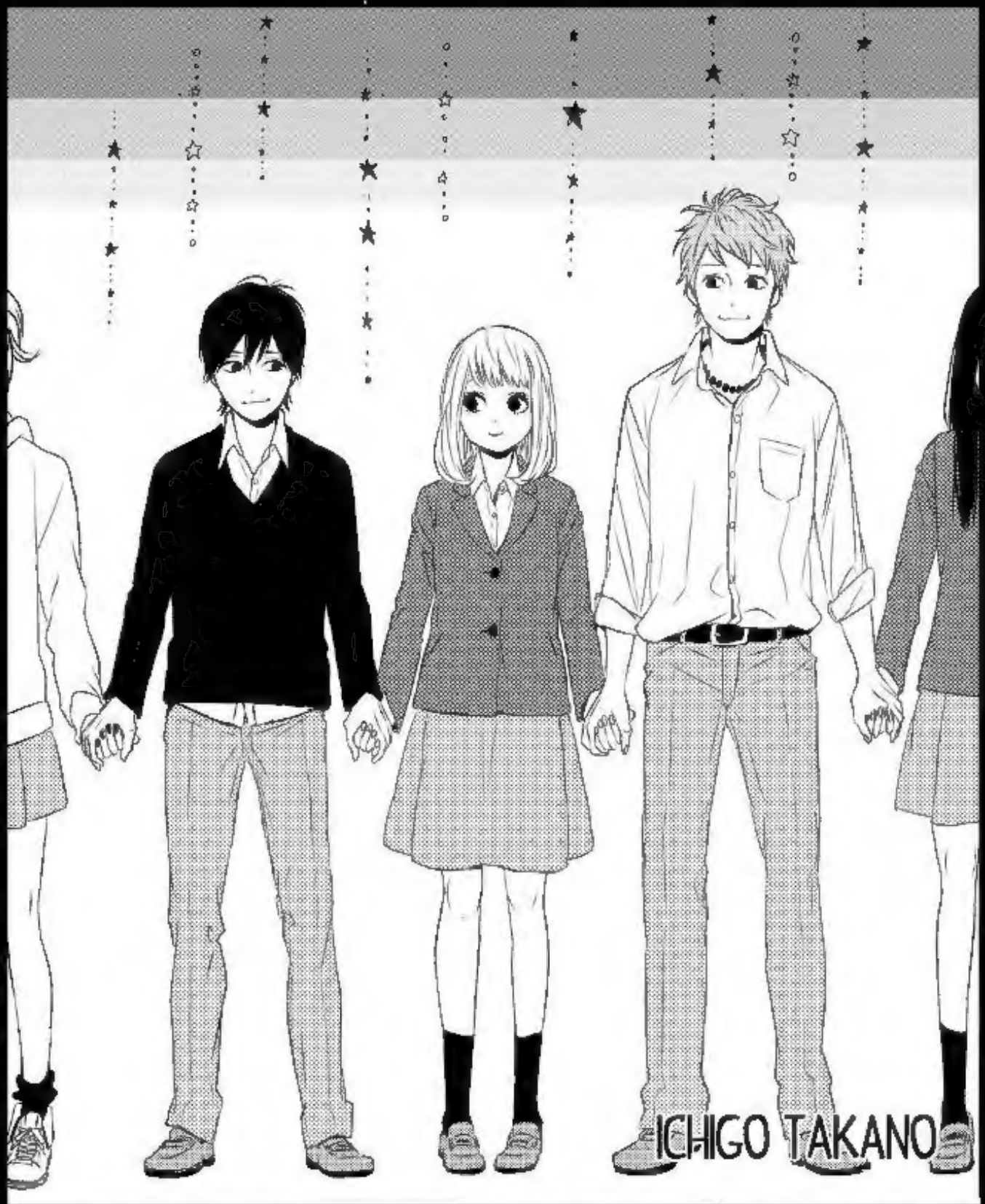
THE
COMPLETE
COLLECTION

2

orange

story and art by
ICHIGO TAKANO


ICHIGO TAKANO

EVERYTHING I'VE DONE UP TO NOW...
...EVEN IF IT'S LITTLE BY LITTLE...
...HAS LED TO A BRIGHT FUTURE. I HOPE.
KAKERU!
HOW LONG ARE YOU GONNA PRACTICE OUT HERE? GET CHANGED!
HUFF
HUFF
CHFF

HUFF
HUFF

WHAT ARE YOU LISTENING TO, KAKERU?

WHAT SHOULD I DO? I CAN'T LOOK KAKERU IN THE FACE.
COME ON! I'LL KNOW IT!
YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW IT, HAGITA-KUN.

LET ME LISTEN TO IT A SEC.
WHY?
Huh?
WHY NOT? COME ON!
GIVE IT TO ME!
GLANCE
I FEEL SO...
...SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT YESTERDAY.
BLUSH

Ah!
That hurts!

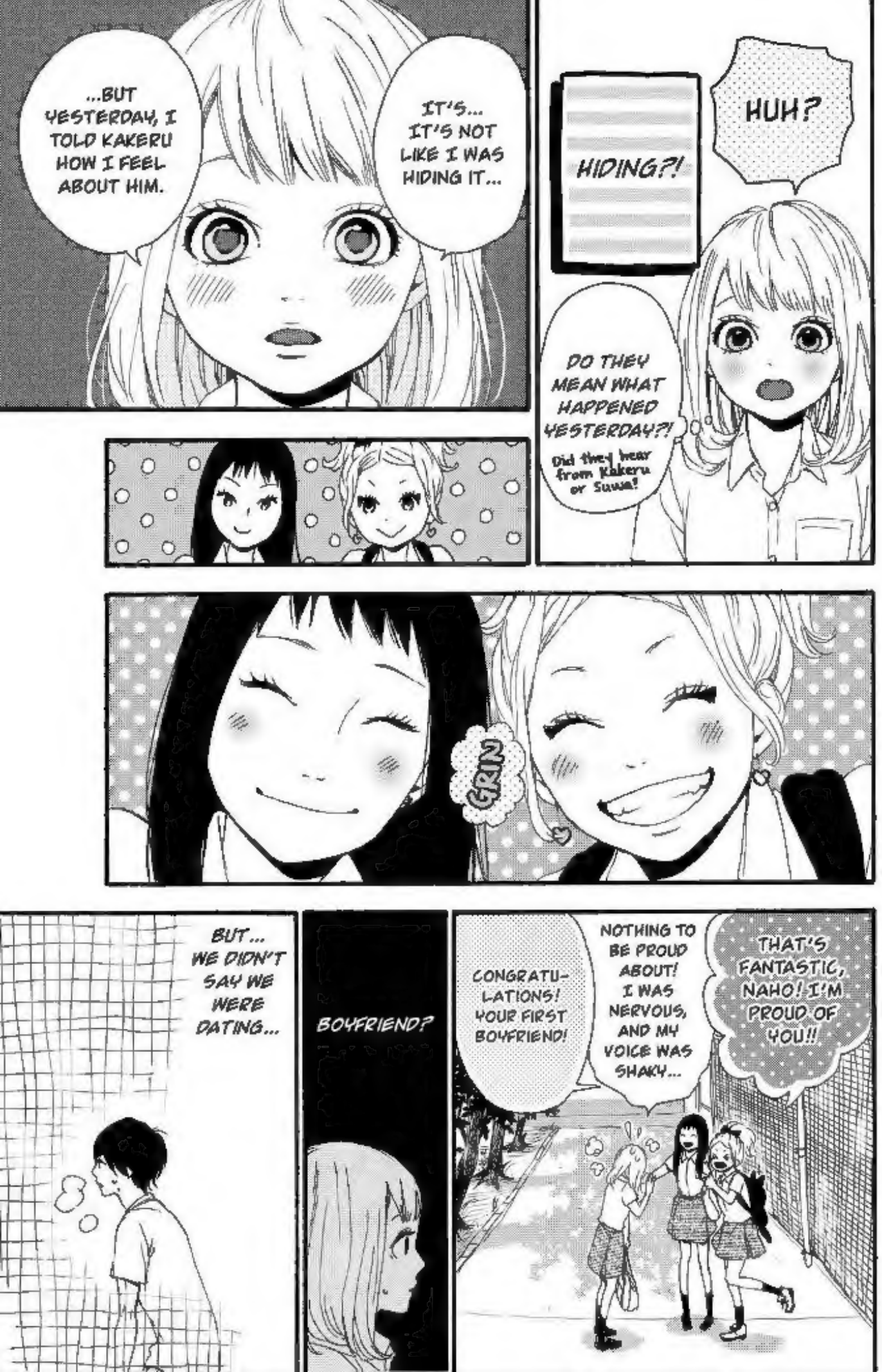
THUMP

...
WANNA LISTEN?
ALL THIS TIME...
HM.
?!
OUR EYES MEET AT LAST.
...I'VE BEEN HESITATING OVER HOW TO SAY SOMETHING TO HIM.

I BET...
...KAKERU NOTICED THAT, TOO.
ON THE 22ND...
...I CANCELLED PLANS TO MEET MY TOKYO FRIEND.
HUH?
I MADE PLANS WITH SUWA INSTEAD.
IT'S MORE FUN HANGING OUT WITH HIM.
OH, GOOD!
I SEE.

I'M SURE I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SAY THAT IF THE LETTER HADN'T COME.
"I LOVE YOU."
ha ha ha!
PFFT
CUT THAT OUT!
LET ME LISTEN!
I'VE BEEN ABLE TO CHANGE, THANKS TO THAT LETTER.
It's fun! Then that makes it all right... NOT!
Yeah, it's fun. Sorry!
Kakeru loves being mean to Nagita.

EVEN THOUGH I COULDN'T EVEN...
...VOICE MY OPINIONS BEFORE...
...NOW I CAN EXPRESS MY FEELINGS.
ひょこ
POP
IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'RE HIDING FROM US?


...BUT YESTERDAY, I TOLD KAKERU HOW I FEEL ABOUT HIM.
IT'S... IT'S NOT LIKE I WAS HIDING IT...
HUH?
HIDING?!
DO THEY MEAN WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY?!
Did they hear from Kakeru or Suwa?
GRIN
BUT... WE DIDN'T SAY WE WERE DATING...
BOYFRIEND?
CONGRATU-LATIONS! YOUR FIRST BOYFRIEND!
NOTHING TO BE PROUD ABOUT! I WAS NERVOUS, AND MY VOICE WAS SHAKY...
THAT'S FANTASTIC, NAHO! I'M PROUD OF YOU!!

IS THERE...
...ANYTHING ELSE YOU'RE KEEPING FROM US?
SO?
ANYTHING ELSE?

ANYTHING ELSE I'M HIDING ..?
ANYTHING ELSE?
KAKERU!!

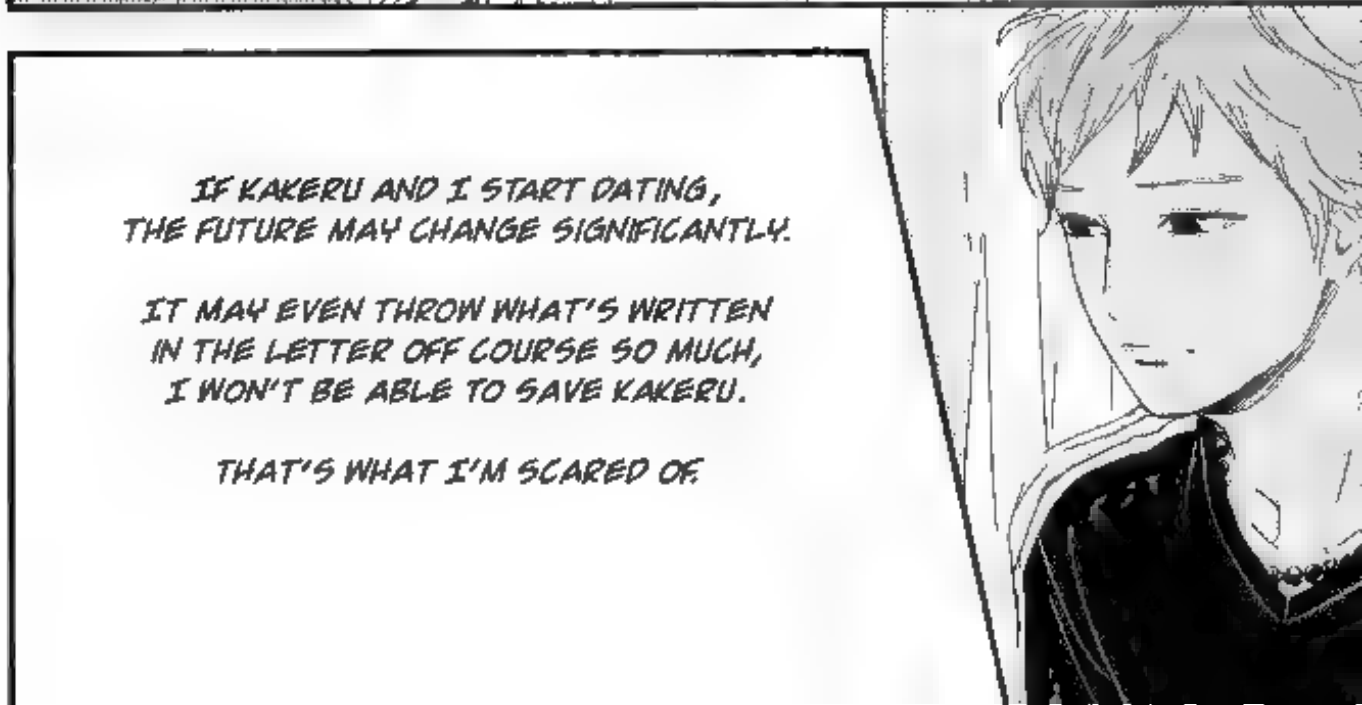
NARUSE!
ARE YOU OKAY?!
IT'S [redacted]...
...BUT ARE YOU OKAY?
YEAH.
I JUST GOT A LITTLE DIZZY.
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE A WEAKLING!
I AM NOT!
Infirmary
SORRY, GUYS.
I MEAN, KAKERU, YOU FAINTED!
YOU SCARED ME!!

ARE YOU...
...EATING RIGHT THESE DAYS?
...
SUWA IS A GLUTTON!
HA HA HA
YEAH, THOUGH NOT AS MUCH AS YOU...
ha ha ha!
...
MY GIRL-FRIEND?
BUT SERIOUSLY, YOU NEED TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
YOU DON'T WANT YOUR GIRLFRIEND TO LAUGH AT YOU, DO YOU?
NAHO, SILLY!
NAHO!

SHE'S NOT MY GIRLFRIEND.
WE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT GOING OUT YET, DID WE?
IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER TO ME.
I MEAN, IF NAHO AND I WERE GOING OUT, I'D PROBABLY HURT HER SOMEHOW.
SO GIVEN THAT, IF WE CAN BE HAPPY AND HAVE A GOOD TIME WITHOUT DATING, I'D JUST AS SOON GO WITH THAT.
HUH?! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IF TWO PEOPLE LOVE EACH OTHER, IT ONLY MAKES SENSE TO DATE!
EH? TAKAMIYA, ARE YOU IN LOVE WITH KAKERU, TOO?
YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT WHAT SHE'S SAYING, SO SHUT UP.

YEAH.
...LOVE YOU.
BECAUSE I REALLY DO...
THEN YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT NAHO'S FEELINGS...
...A LOT MORE THAN YOU DID WITH UEDA-SEMPAI.
WELL, DUH.

NARUSE-KUN, YOUR GRANDMOTHER IS HERE TO PICK YOU UP
I THINK I KNOW HOW KAKERU FEELS.


IF KAKERU AND I START DATING, THE FUTURE MAY CHANGE SIGNIFICANTLY.
IT MAY EVEN THROW WHAT'S WRITTEN IN THE LETTER OFF COURSE SO MUCH, I WON'T BE ABLE TO SAVE KAKERU.
THAT'S WHAT I'M SCARED OF.

?
SO I WAS SLIGHTLY RELIEVED BY KAKERU'S ANSWER.
SORRY...
.NAHO.
SORRY FOR WHAT?
...TO GIVE YOU TWO A SUPPORTIVE PUSH SO THINGS TURN OUT WELL FOR YOU.
IT SAID IN MY LETTER...
NO, I'M FINE.
OH, THAT.
FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO TELL KAKERU TO GO OUT WITH YOU.

I WONDER IF THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE LETTER FROM MY FUTURE SELF ARE CORRECT.
BUT I COULDN'T DO IT.

...ABOUT KAKERU COLLAPSING TODAY?
DID YOUR LETTER SAY ANYTHING...
...
UH UH...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
...ONLY IN OUR WORLD.
THEN THAT'S A NEW FUTURE THAT WAS BORN...

HUH?
...IT STARTED WHEN HE JOINED THE SOCCER CLUB.
I THINK...
BUT HE WANTS TO BE CHOSEN TO PLAY, SO EVERY DAY, HE WORKS TWICE AS HARD AS ANYONE ELSE.
HE'S STILL A NEWBIE IN THE CLUB, SO HE HASN'T BEEN ABLE TO PLAY IN ANY MATCHES YET.
...IT MAKES ME WONDER...
...IF I WAS RIGHT TO INVITE HIM TO JOIN IN THE FIRST PLACE.
HE'S PROBABLY WORN HIMSELF OUT THAT WAY.
HE HASN'T BEEN LOOKING TOO WELL LATELY, EITHER.
IF THE CLUB IS BECOMING A BURDEN ON KAKERU...

I CAN TELL KAKERU LOVES BEING PART OF THE CLUB
OF COURSE YOU WERE.
JUST BECAUSE HIS FAINTING WASN'T IN THE LETTER DOESN'T MEAN IT'S THE CLUB'S FAULT.
RIGHT NOW, I KIND OF UNDERSTAND WHY SUWA'S AFRAID...
...TO MAKE A CHOICE.
YEAH...
BUT EVEN IF THE FUTURE CAN BE CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE LETTER, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN .
...AND THAT'S MAKIN' ME A LITTLE NERVOUS.

BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE ANY MORE REGRETS.
...MADE ME THINK I HAD TO DO EVERYTHING I COULD TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE LETTER ..
NOT BEING ABLE TO SAVE KAKERU ON THE DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY
"I WONDER IF THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE LETTER FROM MY FUTURE SELF ARE CORRECT"
TWEEET
...BUT I KNOW IT'S NOT MISTAKEN.
I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT BEFORE...
THAT LETTER HAS HELPED ME OUT TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

OCTOBER 1ST
DURING P.E., EVERYONE'S TIMES ARE RECORDED IN THE 100-METER DASH.
KAKERU IS CHOSEN TO RUN THE RELAY AT THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.

SIX BOYS AND GIRLS FROM OUR CLASS ARE GOING TO DO IT.
KAKERU IS THE FASTEST RUNNER, SO HE'S GOING TO BE THE ANCHOR.

BUT ON THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL, DURING THE RELAY, KAKERU IS RUNNING IN THE LEAD WHEN HE SUDDENLY TWISTS HIS ANKLE AND FALLS. AS A RESULT, THE CLASS COMES IN LAST

KAKERU FEELS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LOSS

HE WAS ANXIOUS ABOUT BEING CHOSEN FOR THE EVENT HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN PUT UNDER THAT MUCH PRESSURE.

IT SEEMS HE PUT HIMSELF IN THE SHOES OF AZU, WHO STRUCK OUT, LOSING THE BASEBALL GAME AT THE SPRING BALL GAME TOURNAMENT

FOR KAKERU'S SAKE, DO SOMETHING SO HE'S NO LONGER A MEMBER OF THE RELAY TEAM.

KAKERU!
HUH?
HOW ABOUT I RUN IN YOUR PLACE?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.
IF IT'S TOO MUCH PRESSURE...
IT'S OKAY TO DROP OUT!
TH-THAT'S RIGHT!
LOOKING FORWARD TO IT?
I'M ACTUALLY KIND OF LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
NO, IT'S FINE.
WANT ME TO TALK TO THE TEACHER FOR YOU?
...

SO I WANNA ONE DO NO TEN
IT MAKES I CAN BE USEFUL SOMETIMES!
I'M HAPPY TO BE PICKED
...
WAIT ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?
WHAT THE HECK?
KAKERU'S FEELINGS HAVE CHANGED
IT'S BECAUSE I CHANGED THE FUTURE AT THE BALL GAME TOURNAMENT
KAKERU SAYS HE WANTS TO DO IT, SO JUST LET HIM DO IT

IT'S JUST THAT YOU COLLAPSED THE OTHER DAY, KAKERU.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU. IF SOMETHING WERE TO HAPPEN...
UNLESS YOU'VE GOT A REASON FOR NOT WANTING HIM TO DO IT?
NO... IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T WANT HIM TO DO IT...
MAYBE...
...I SHOULDN'T DO IT AFTER ALL.
WELL, I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN...
...BUT KAKERU WANTS TO DO IT
I KNOW, BUT
HEY, YOU'RE GONNA BE LATE TO CLASS!
SHUT UP, HAGITA!
IF I FELL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RELAY...
...I WOULD RUIN IT FOR EVERYONE.

SUWA, WILL YOU RUN FOR ME?
U-YEAH, SURE.
THANK YOU
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, KAKERU?
YEAH.
I THINK...
.. I WAS WRONG TO DO THAT.
WELL, WE DIDN'T EXPECT KAKERU TO SAY HE WANTED TO DO IT.
AFTER NOT BEING ABLE TO PLAY IN MATCHES FOR THE CLUB...
...HE MUST'VE BEEN HAPPY TO BE CHOSEN.

IS THIS...
...REALLY THE RIGHT WAY TO GO?
MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE LET HIM DO THE RELAY...
BUT WE WERE BOTH WARNED AGAINST IT IN OUR LETTERS.
YEAH.
...SO HE ENJOYS EVERY SINGLE DAY.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO MAKE IT...
MAYBE WE HURT KAKERU.

...SO THERE MAY BE THINGS REQUESTED OF ME IN THE LETTER THAT I CAN'T FULFILL.

THE FUTURE IS CHANGING NOW...

BUT I THINK I FELL A LITTLE SHORT OF THAT WISH THIS TIME.

SUWA!
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WHEN THAT TIME COMES?
COME HERE A SECOND
?
IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'RE HIDING FROM US?
??
WHERE'S NAHO?
WHAT?

ABOUT KAKERU!

I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE RELAY AT THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
WHAT IS IT, NARUSE?
SENSEI!

SENSEI!
...YEAH.
WHAT?
YOU DON'T WANNA BE THE ANCHOR?
TAKA-CHAN?
WHAT IS IT, CHINO?

I WANT TO BE IN THE RELAY.
YOU WANT TO DO IT?
WHAT IS THIS?
SENSEI, ME TOO!
I WANNA RUN IN THE RELAY!
SWISH

THE THING IS...
...I'VE ALREADY CHOSEN THE RUNNERS.
REPRESENTING THE CLASS IS KIND OF A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY, SO...
...IF POSSIBLE, I'D LIKE TO LET ONE OF THEM TO RUN IN MY PLACE.
UM...
ACTUALLY, WE TALKED ABOUT IT, AND I MADE A DECISION.
I FEEL...
...THE SAME WAY.
WHAT IS THIS SUDDEN URGE TO BE IN THE RELAY?
WELL, IT'S THE FIRST ATHLETIC FESTIVAL SINCE KAKERU STARTED HERE...
...SO I THOUGHT IT'D BE FUN TO DO IT TOGETHER.

WE WANT TO RUN WITH KAKERU.

I'LL TAKE HIS PLACE.
Me, too!
I WANT SOMEBODY TO TAKE MY PLACE!
WHAT?! IT'S NO FAIR IF ONLY THE GIRLS GET TO SWITCH!
NOW SEE WHAT YOU'VE STARTED?!

EVERYTHING I DO...

..DOESN'T HAVE TO BASED ON FOLLOWING THAT LETTER.

THERE'S NO NEED TO GET CAUGHT UP IN THAT KIND OF DOUBT.

EVEN THE FUTURE ME DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THE RESULTS WILL BE.

BATTLE
I...
I...
MY VOICE...

...IS SHAKING.
I WANT TO RUN...
...WITH KAKERU.
HEY.
HAGITA.
...

HAGITA...
...
HA-
GI-
TA!

CREAK
CREAK

IT'S NOT LIKE I'M FAST OR ANYTHING, BUT...
CAN I BE IN IT, TOO?

KAKERU IS THE ANCHOR...
...SO WE'LL PASS THE BATON OFF TO EACH OTHER UNTIL IT GETS TO HIM.

A DIFFERENT PATH IS FINE...

...AS LONG AS WE MAKE SURE IT LEADS TO A BRIGHT FUTURE.

I'M RESPONSIBLE...

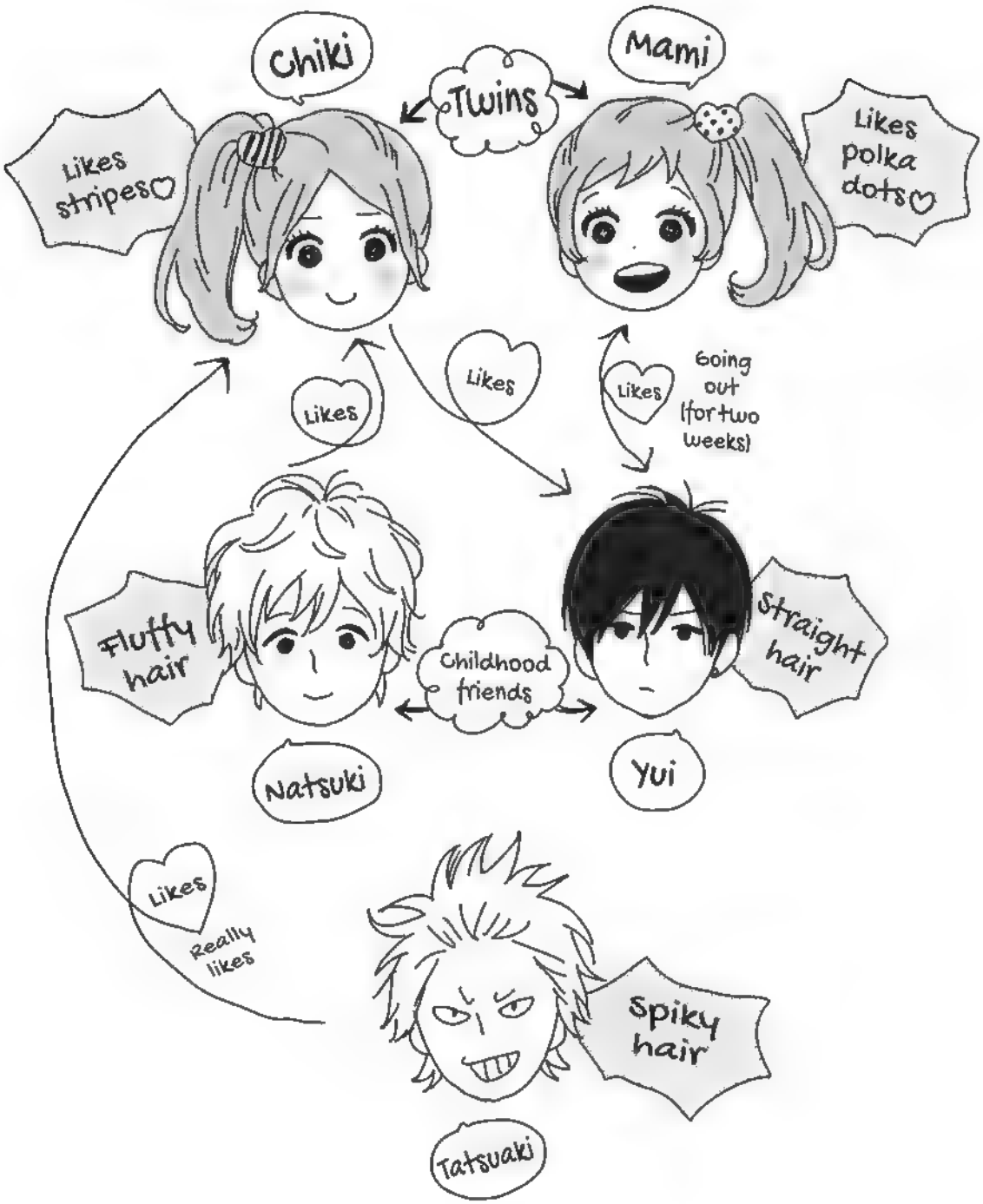
...FOR SAVING KAKERU...

...AND MAKING HIM SMILE EVERY DAY.

HARUKIRO ASTRONAUT

A very loose...

Character Introduction!



Haruiro Astronaut
Chapter 3

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE...
"I LIKE YOU, CHIKI-CHAN."
THAT A GUY'S TOLD ME HE LIKES ME.
THINGS CHANGED.
FROM THAT DAY ON...

It's Natsuki-kun!
Ah, chiki-chan!

That basket you made was amazing!
Nice work today!
Natsuki-kun!

AH!
IT'S JUST ONE MORE THING I'M NOT USED TO.
HAD A GUY WAVE AT ME BEFORE.
HECK, I'VE NEVER EVEN...
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO SAY?
CHIKI-CHAN, YOUR FACE IS BRIGHT RED!
Relax!

IT'S SCARY, BUT IT ALSO MAKES ME HAPPY!
CHOMP
MAMI.
TOMATO.
Why is it just me eating?
Yui-kun, I don't even like most of those things...
Be quiet and eat.
You're so cute...
NUZU
NUZU
MUSH-ROOM.
BROCCOLI.
CHOMP
CHOMP
CHOMP
ANOTHER TOMATO.

IT'S TATSU-AKI!!
SONE-YOSHI-KUN...?
WHO CARES?
GRRR!
TELL ME WHERE CHIKI-CHAN IS!
Now!
DO YOU EVEN HEAR YOURSELF?
NO ONE'S GONNA TELL YOU ANYTHING IF YOU ASK LIKE THAT.
NO.
WOULD YOU KINDLY TELL ME WHERE CHIKI-CHAN IS, PLEASE?
WHAT THE--?! DAMNIT! YOU'RE SUCH A JERK!!
HUH?
IT'S NOT LIKE I'D TELL YOU ANYWAY.
SHE'S WITH NATSUKI RIGHT NOW.

HUH?
CHIKI-CHAN'S... GOING OUT WITH HIM, ISN'T SHE?
JUST THE TWO OF THEM?!
TOGETH-ER?!
THAT'S RIGHT, SO DON'T BOTHER CHIKI ANYMORE!
You two are so funny~!
Let go, you moron!

MMF! MMF!
?
?
?
NEVER MIND. SORRY FOR BUTTING IN...
MMF! MMF!
THEY'RE NOT--
DON'T COME BACK.

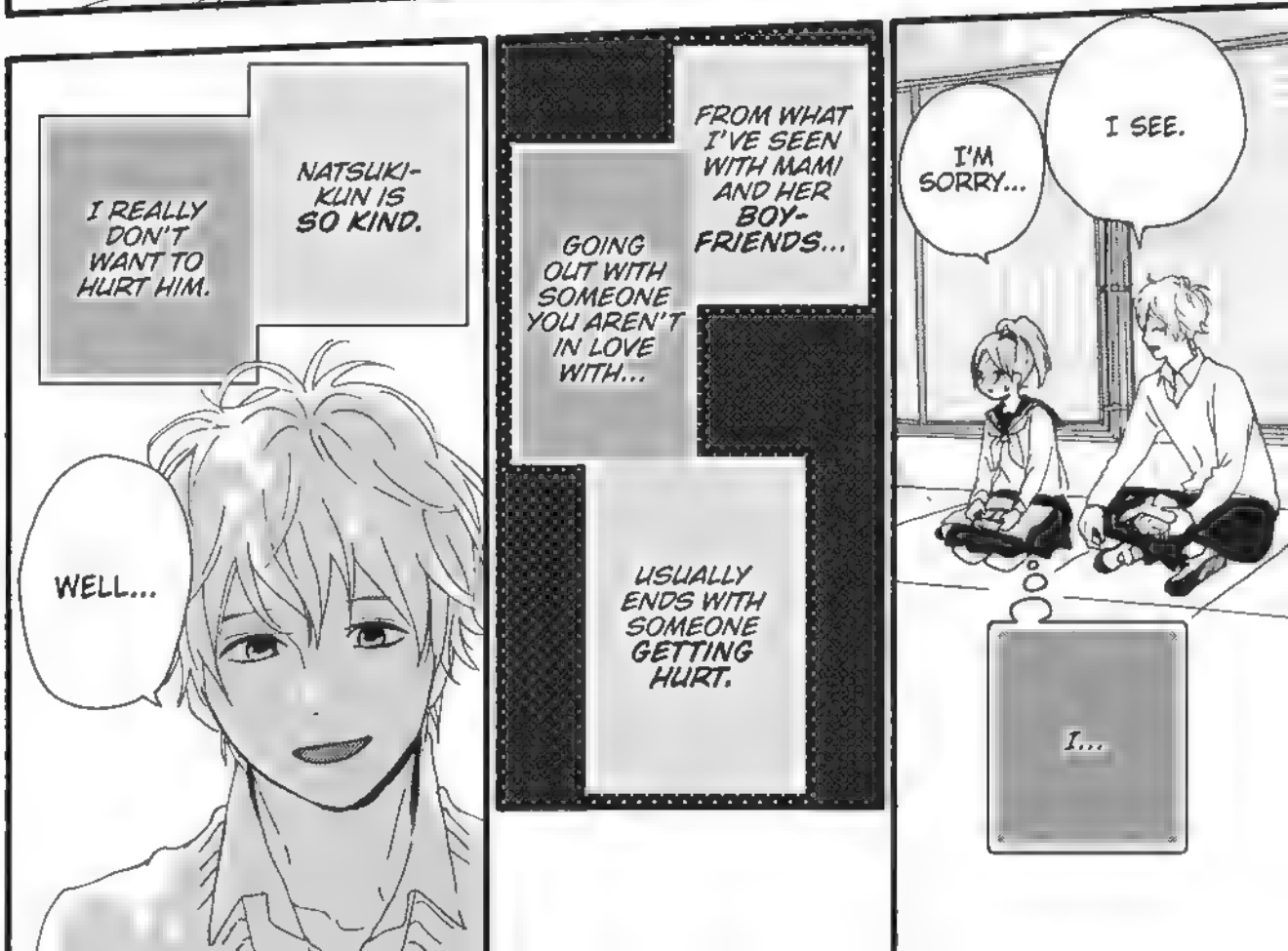
YEAH.
MAMI CONVINCED ME TO JOIN. WE WERE BOTH ON THE TEAM.
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE ON THE BASKETBALL TEAM IN MIDDLE SCHOOL!
REALLY, CHIKI-CHAN?

BUT STILL, BASKETBALL WAS FUN!
HA HA HA! THAT'S SO MAMI-CHAN.
OF COURSE, A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER MAMI HAD TO QUIT...
She kept tripping and getting hurt.

AH...
EVERY DAY, CHIKI-CHAN.
I WISH THAT YOU AND I COULD TALK LIKE THIS...

IT'S LIKE...
GOING OUT.
WE'RE ALREADY...

I'D LIKE TO GO OUT WITH SOMEONE AFTER I'VE ALREADY FALLEN FOR THEM.
I THINK...
WITH NATSU-KI-KUN?!
GOING OUT?!
AH, UHM...
I HAVEN'T REALLY HAD A CHANCE TO THINK ABOUT IT.

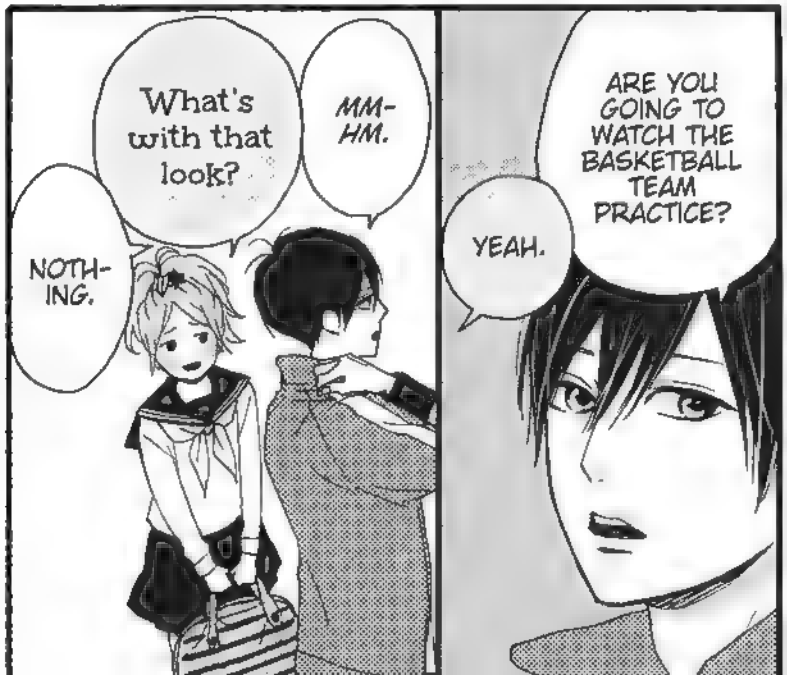

I REALLY DON'T WANT TO HURT HIM.
NATSUKI-KUN IS SO KIND.
WELL...
GOING OUT WITH SOMEONE YOU AREN'T IN LOVE WITH...
FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN WITH MAMI AND HER BOY-FRIENDS...
USUALLY ENDS WITH SOMEONE GETTING HURT.
I'M SORRY...
I SEE.
I...

I'LL DO MY BEST TO MAKE YOU FALL FOR ME.
I'LL MAKE YOU FORGET ALL ABOUT YUI!
WHY WOULD A PRINCE LIKE HIM GO FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME?
I KNOW THERE ARE CUTER GIRLS IN THIS SCHOOL ...
BING
BONG
BENG
BONG...
SHALL WE GO BACK TO CLASS?
SURE.
COUGH!
COUGH!
GOT A COLD?
NO, JUST A SORE THROAT.
HERE YOU GO.
?

IF I WERE TO GO OUT WITH NATSUKI-KUN...
I'LL SAVE IT FOR LATER!♪
IT'S A COUGH DROP.
WOW, THANKS!

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN MAMI, HAVE YOU?
AH, YUI-KUN...
NOPE.

I WONDER IF EVERY DAY...
WOULD BE AS PEACEFUL AS THIS.


What's with that look?
MM-HM.
NOTH-ING.
ARE YOU GOING TO WATCH THE BASKETBALL TEAM PRACTICE?
YEAH.

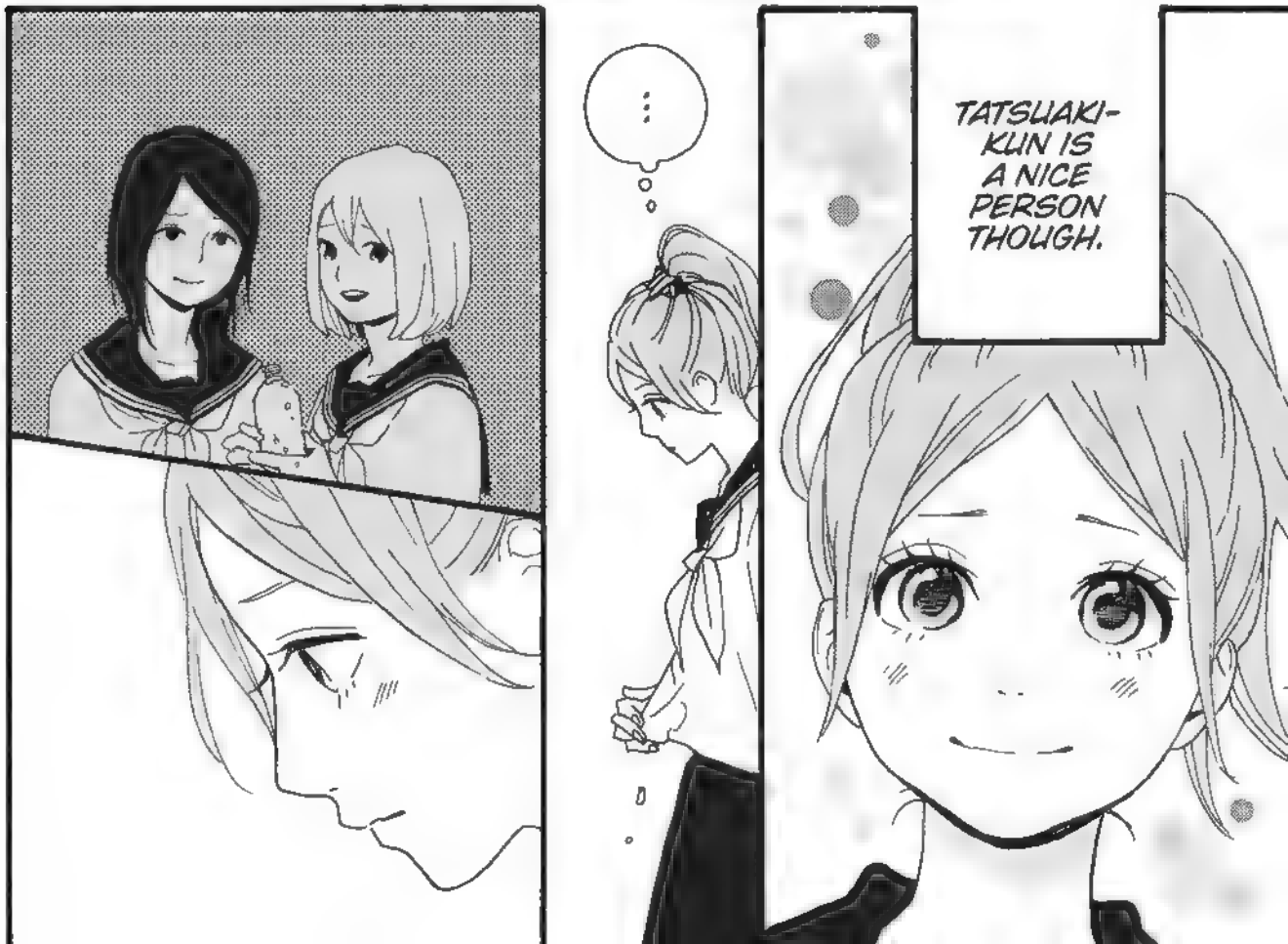
WHERE'S MAMI?
?
BYE!
WELL, LATER.
Hee hee!
パラリ
SORRY!
MY HAND SLIPPED.

HEY.
WHAT THE HELL'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

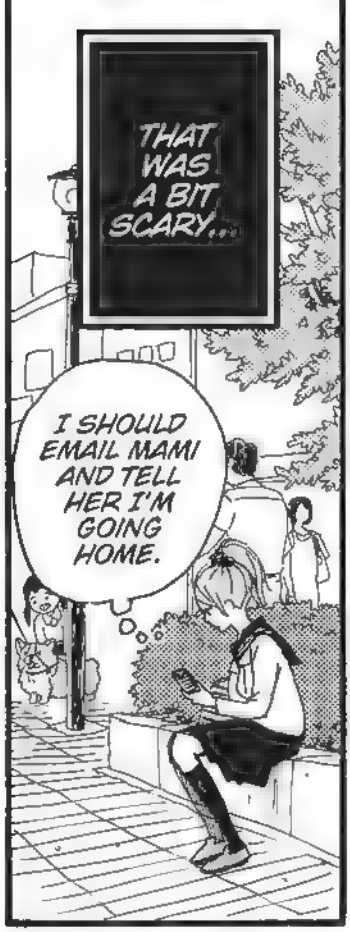
WHAT?
THIS GIRL IS ALWAYS THROWING HERSELF AT NATSUKI-KUN AND YUI-KUN, SO...
WHAT?!
you're too loud!
SO IT'S OKAY TO THROW WATER ON HER?!
WHAT ARE YOU, FIVE?! APOLOGIZE!!

CHIKI-CHAN?!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
DASH
SOME-HOW, SUD-DENLY...
I JUST HAD TO GET AWAY FROM THERE.
CHIKI-CHAN, YOU OKAY?!
KYAA !!!
YOU SCARED ME!
DID THOSE BITCHES HURT YOU?!
NO! I'M FINE!
BUT YOUR CLOTHES ARE SOAKED, AREN'T THEY?!

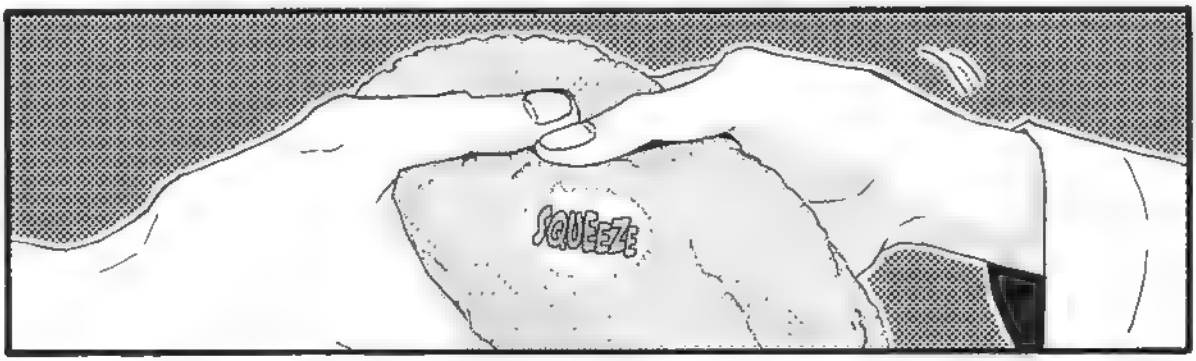
WAIT...
HEY...
DON'T MOVE!
Umm ...
A TOWEL!
I'LL GO BUY YOU A TOWEL, JUST STAY RIGHT THERE!!
I HAVE A HAND-KERCHIEF I CAN USE...
He is loud.


TATSUAKI-KUN IS A NICE PERSON THOUGH.
...

CHIKI-CHAN, I BOUGHT ONE!!
HERE !!!
Already?!


THAT WAS A BIT SCARY...
I SHOULD EMAIL MAMI AND TELL HER I'M GOING HOME.

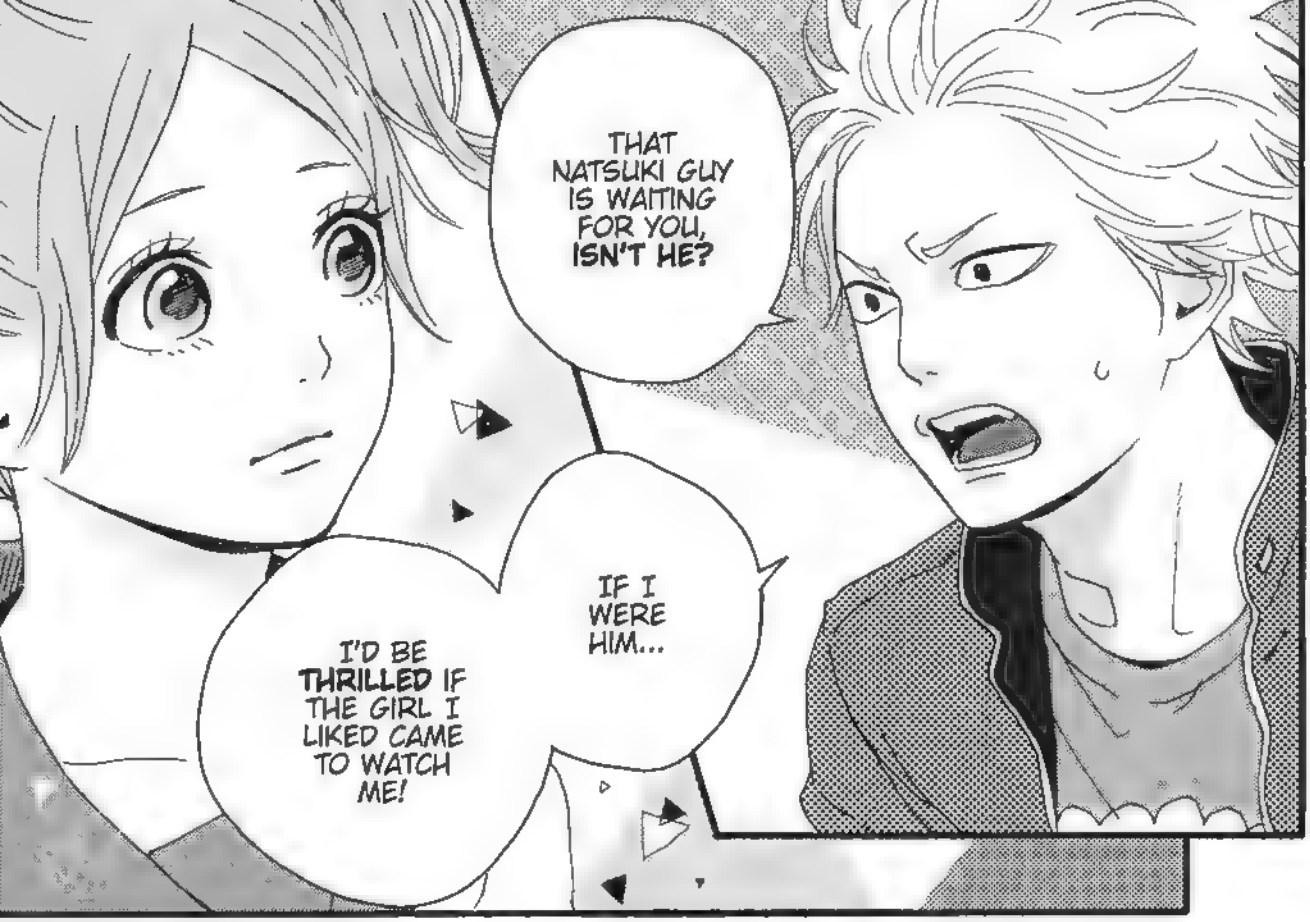
PANT
PANT
UM, THANKS...


SQUEEZE

MY FINGER
WHAT ?!
UWAAAAAAH!

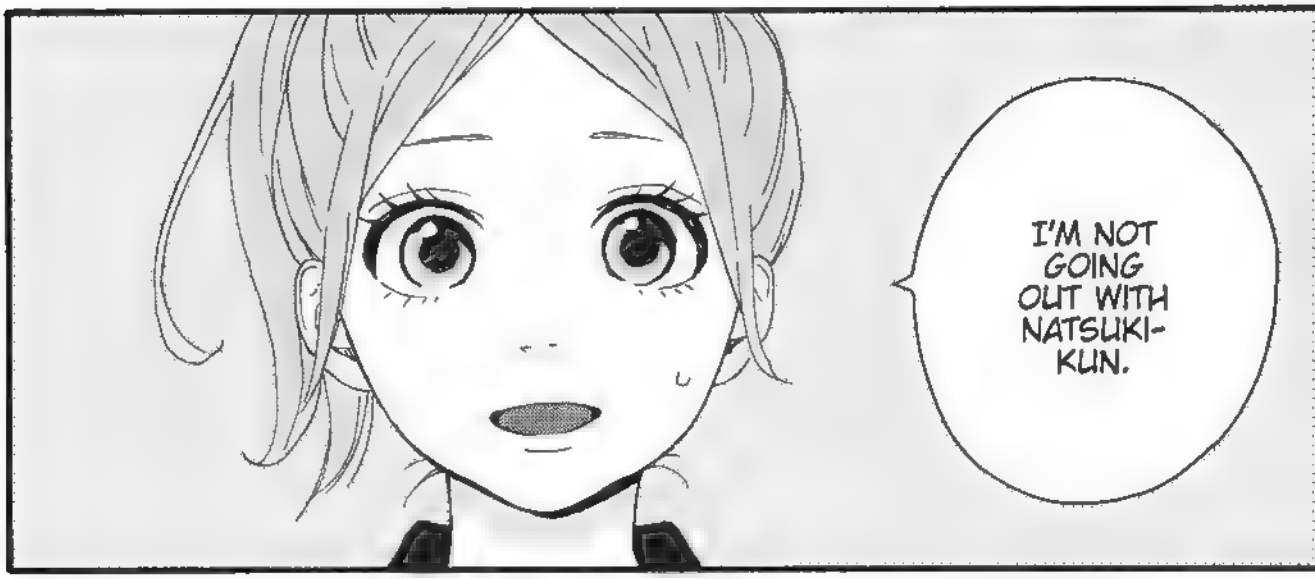
※ They brushed fingers.
WE HELD HANDS!
You okay?
BY THE WAY, CHIKI-CHAN...
WEREN'T YOU GONNA WATCH THE BASKETBALL TEAM?!

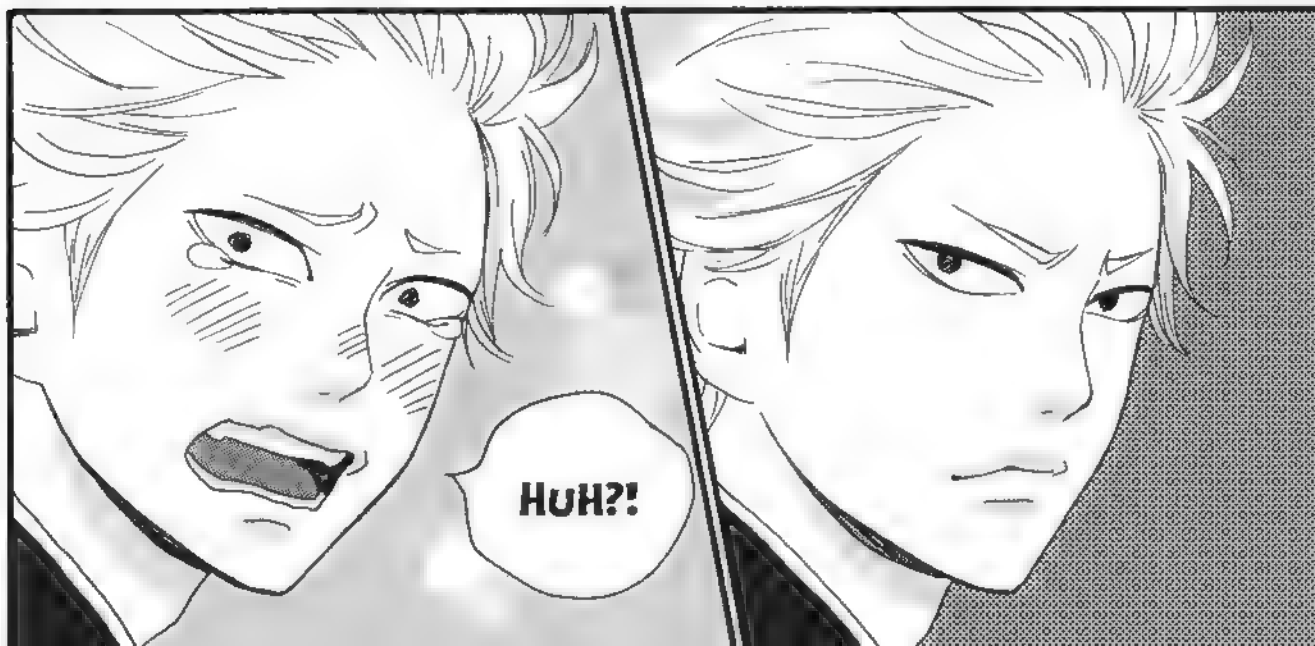
THOSE OTHER GIRLS SCARE ME...
I THINK I'LL QUIT WATCHING THE PRACTICES TOO.
Ah, sorry, I just happened to overhear.
IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW.
I ALREADY TOLD MAMI I WAS GOING ON HOME.
HUH?
YOU GOTTA GO!
NO WAY!


THAT NATSUKI GUY IS WAITING FOR YOU, ISN'T HE?
IF I WERE HIM...
I'D BE THRILLED IF THE GIRL I LIKED CAME TO WATCH ME!

IF IT WERE ME...
I'D BE SAD IF SHE JUST SAID "WHATEVER" AND WENT HOME.
NOT BEING ABLE TO WALK HOME WITH HER...
I'D CRY! I'D CRY FREAKIN' RIVERS OF TEARS!
AH!
WHY IS HE BRINGING UP NATSUKI?
I should shut up now...
AH HA HA

GOING OUT?
YEAH, I HEARD ABOUT IT.
THOUGH EVEN BEFORE THAT, I HAD A HUNCH...
I MEAN, CHIKI-CHAN, IF THE TWO OF YOU ARE GOING OUT...
HUH?
YOU CAN'T GIVE UP SO EASILY, YA KNOW?


I'M NOT GOING OUT WITH NATSUKI-KUN.

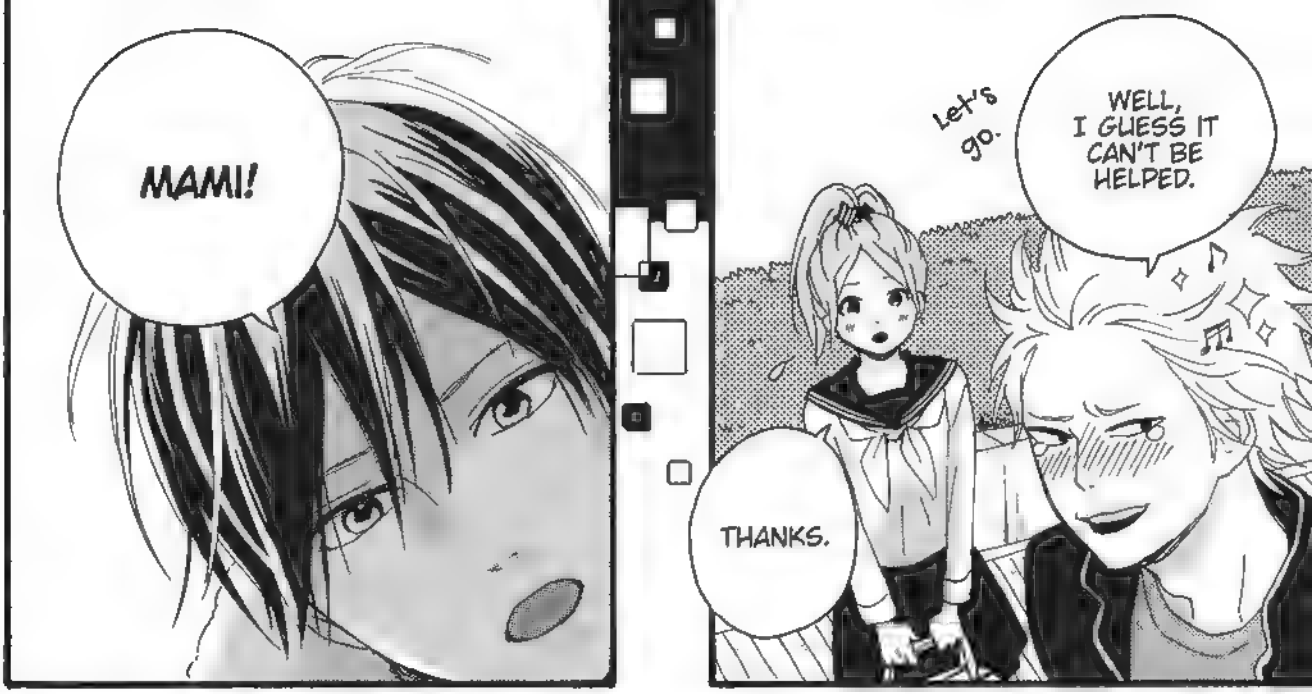

HUH?!

WOO-HOO--!!!!
?!
OH YEAH!
ALL RIGHT!
LIM, WELL...
Just now, what did you say...?
What did...
GULP...
NATSUKI-KUN AND I AREN'T GOING OUT, AND WE NEVER MADE A PROMISE TO WALK HOME TOGETHER.

ALLOW ME TO WALK YOU HOME, PRINCESS.

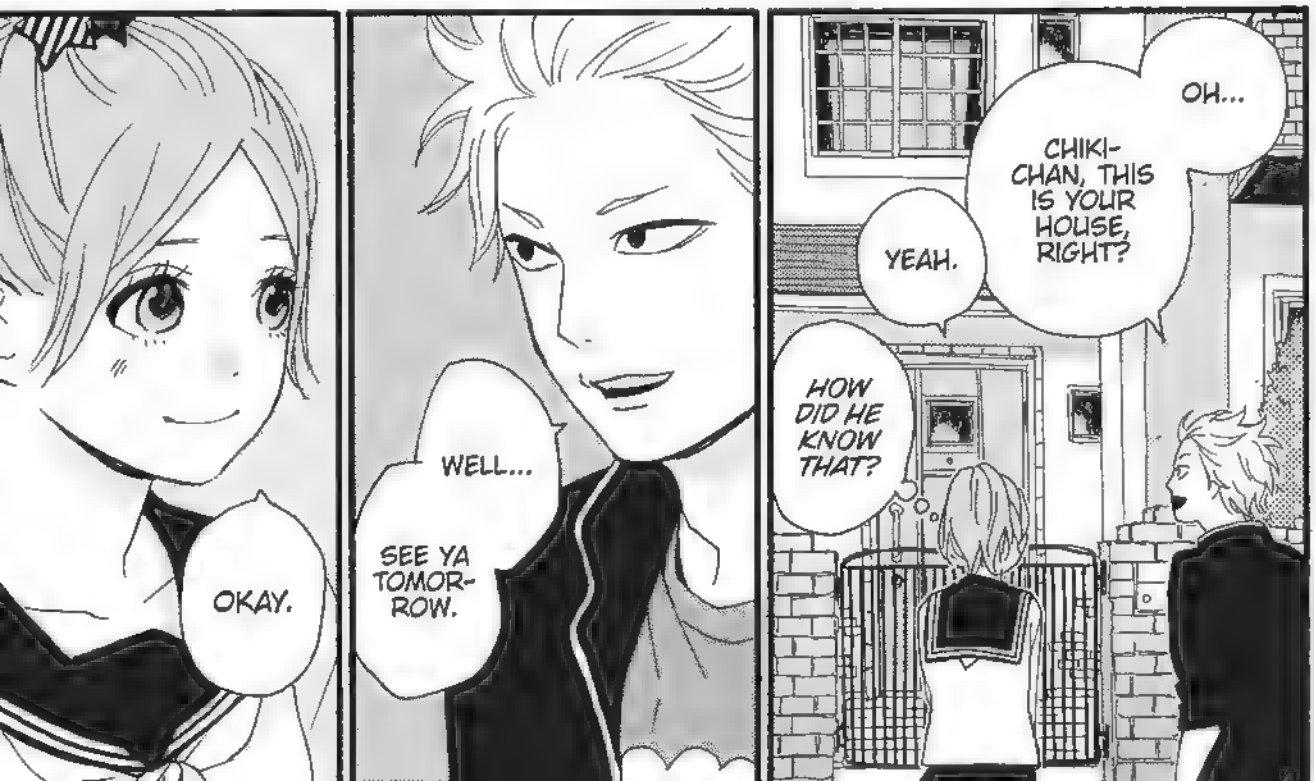
THAT'S TRUE...
I AM STILL A BIT SHAKEN.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T MIND?

.....
UH, I MEAN...
IF THOSE GIRLS FROM EARLIER ARE AROUND, THERE COULD BE TROUBLE.


MAMI!
WELL, I GUESS IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
Let's go.
THANKS.

WHERE'D CHIKI GO?
SHE WENT HOME.
WHAA?! WENT HOME?!
SHE SAID SHE WAS WITH TATSUAKI-KUN.
HUH?!
NO WAY!
WHAT'S GOING ON?

WHEN I COME HOME HE BARKS HIS HEAD OFF.
YEAH, MY DOG'S CRAZY.
HE DOESN'T LIKE ME.
SERI-OUSLY?!
WE ALSO HAVE ONE!
Mine's poop-colored.
It's apricot colored.
What?! Tatsuaki-kun, you have a toy poodle, too?!
AH HA HA!
He thinks I'm a robber every time!
BUT HE STILL HATES MY GUTS!
IT'S BEEN ALMOST SEVEN YEARS SINCE WE GOT HIM...


OKAY.
WELL...
SEE YA TOMOR-ROW.
HOW DID HE KNOW THAT?
YEAH.
CHIKI-CHAN, THIS IS YOUR HOUSE, RIGHT?
OH...

HEY!
HOLD UP A SEC.
I BOUGHT THIS EARLIER.
HERE.
Cough Drops

IT'S SOME COUGH DROPS.
YOUR VOICE SEEMED DIFFERENT, CHIKI-CHAN...
SO I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU HAD A SORE THROAT.
UH...
TH-THANK YOU.

HEY...
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE NOTICED...
WHAT AN INTERESTING GUY.
MAYBE WE COULD WALK HOME TOGETHER AGAIN.
BLUSH

hee hee!
MAMI AGAIN, HUH?
WHOOSH
WITH MAMI-CHAN!!

WOULD HAVE FELT LONELY.
IF I HAD BEEN ON MY OWN, I DEFINITELY...
I'M GLAD TATSUAKI-KUN WALKED WITH ME.

I'm home--!
CHIKI-CHAAAN!
WHAT HAPPENED ?!
WHY DIDN'T YOU GO TO THE PRACTICE?

WHAT WERE YOU DOING WITH TATSUAKI?
HE WALKED ME HOME.
THAT'S IT?
YUP.
HEY, CHIKI.
YEAH?
WAS IT BECAUSE I ATE YOUR FRIED EGG THIS MORNING?!
Don't worry! I WASN'T MAD OR ANYTHING.
WHA...?
IF YOU HURT NATSUKI...
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU.

Cough Drops
COUGH DROP
MINE
I'M NOT GOING TO HURT HIM!
THEN HURRY UP AND GO OUT WITH HIM.
YUI-KUN, DON'T BE MEAN TO CHIKI-CHAN!
Go home!
"I'LL DO MY BEST TO MAKE YOU FALL FOR ME.
"I'LL MAKE YOU FORGET ALL ABOUT YUI!"
SOMEONE I REALLY, REALLY LIKE.
I CAN FIND SOMEONE I LIKE AGAIN.
MAYBE SOME-DAY...

To be continued...

Hello. It's Takano again.

I went flower-viewing in Matsumoto with my managing editor.

Dumplings are good, but sake is better!

It was fun.

Though I didn't get even one picture of the cherry blossoms.

Matsumoto didn't really show up much in volume 3.

But if I think about the place I regularly go in Matsumoto..

it's this restaurant called "Five Horn" inside the Matsumoro Parco.

I usually go there for lunch.

Their cake is delicious, and they give you big slices! I love it.

After that, I go shopping in Parco.

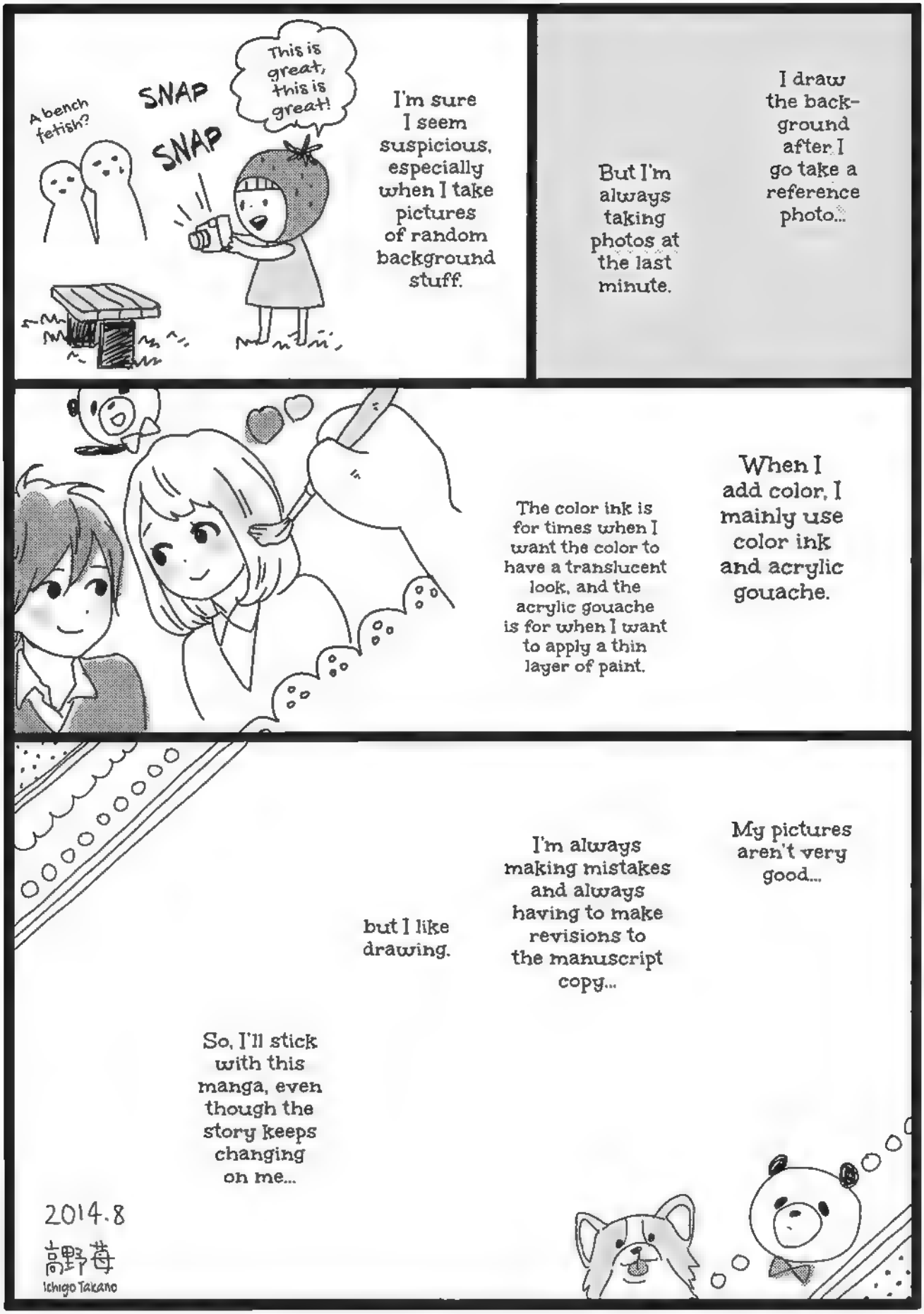
Incidentally, I used Agatanomori Park on the cover of volumes 1 and 2.

For volume 3, I thought I'd use Nawate Street for the cover background.

Working on the cover for volume 3.

Shoot, it's still not done...

I've been working on this for six days.


A bench fetish?
SNAP
SNAP
This is great, this is great!
I'm sure I seem suspicious, especially when I take pictures of random background stuff.
But I'm always taking photos at the last minute.
I draw the background after I go take a reference photo...
When I add color, I mainly use color ink and acrylic gouache.
The color ink is for times when I want the color to have a translucent look, and the acrylic gouache is for when I want to apply a thin layer of paint.
My pictures aren't very good...
I'm always making mistakes and always having to make revisions to the manuscript copy...
but I like drawing.
So, I'll stick with this manga, even though the story keeps changing on me...
2014.8
高野苺
Ichigo Takano

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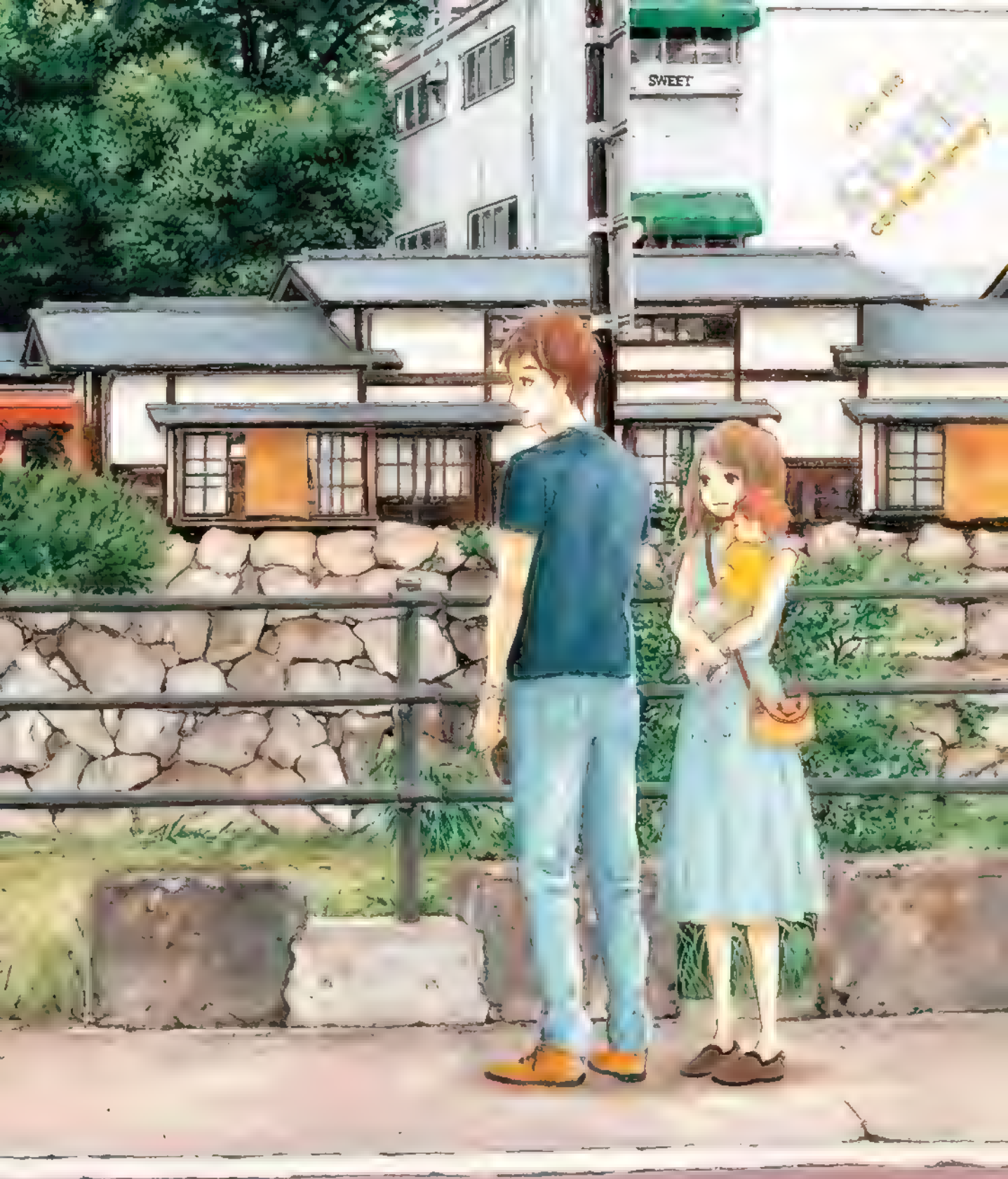

Rated: TEEN

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ICHIGO TAKANO

THE RELAY RUNNERS FOR THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL...

...ARE NARUSE, SUWA, HAGITA, CHINO, MURASAKA, AND TAKAMIYA

HAGITA, CAN YOU ACTUALLY RUN?
OF COURSE NOT.
YES, YOU CAN! WHEN YOU REALLY HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, YOU PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS
FORGET IT. I QUIT.

I'M OVERJOYED.
KAKERU SMILED ..
...LOOKING FORWARD TO THE RELAY EVEN MORE.
NOW I'M...
I FIGURED YOU'D VOLUNTEER TOO, NAHO.
I HEARD YOU'D BE WILLING TO TAKE MY PLACE
EH?
ARE YOU SURE? YOU DON'T MIND IF I DO IT?
NAHO-CHAN!
THANK YOU FOR TAKING MY PLACE IN THE RELAY!
OF COURSE I DON'T!

DON'T BE NERVOUS, NARUSE!
HAVE A GOOD TIME RUNNING TOGETHER!
WE'LL BE ROOTING FOR YOU!
EH?!
. WE THOUGHT YOU'D BE UP FOR IT, SO WE VOLUNTEERED YOU!
WHEN SHE SAID SHE WANTED TO SWITCH WITH SOMEONE..
YOU CAN DO IT!
DO YOUR BEST!
GOOD LUCK, NAHO-CHAN!

I'M GLAD IT WORKED OUT THIS WAY.

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT...
THIS TIME, WE MADE A DIFFERENT CHOICE THAN WHAT THE LETTERS SUGGESTED
BUT IF THE RESULT LEADS TO SAVING KAKERU, THEN IT'S ALL TO THE GOOD
I'M HAPPY
IT TURNED OUT THIS WAY, TOO.
THANK YOU, SUWA
YEAH.
IT'S THE OTHERS WHO PULLED THIS OFF.
NAH..
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.

OCTOBER 14TH
THE LETTER'S ENTRIES THE NEXT ONE IS THE DAY OF THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL
SUWA
FOR NOW, I M GOING TO STOP RELYING ON THE LETTER
OKAY.
WELL, I THINK I'M GONNA HIT THE SACK.
ﾌﾌ...
RUSTLE
INSTEAD, I'M GOING TO TRY THINKING ABOUT WHAT WOULD MAKE KAKERJ MOST HAPPY .
...AND THEN ACT ON THAT.
YEAH
SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN

I'LL KEEP IT IN THE DRAWER FOR THE TIME BEING
I ALWAYS CARRIED THE LETTER AROUND WITH ME
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE YOU RUN WEIRD
THAT WAS SLOW, HAGITA!
OKAY, FINISH LINE.
I THINK YOU'RE ACTUALLY THE SLOWEST RUNNER IN OUR YEAR

THE TEACHER SAID THAT EVEN IF WE COME IN LAST PLACE, IT DOESN'T MATTER.
THE POINT IS FOR KAKERU TO ENJOY THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
AND KAKERU WOULD ENJOY COMING IN LAST, WOULD HE?
I WANT TO RUN WITH YOU TOO, HAGITA-KUN.
IF THE SIX OF US GET TO RUN TOGETHER..
I'LL BE HAPPY NO MATTER WHAT PLACE WE'RE IN
RUNNING IN THE RELAY WILL MAKE YOU POPULAR, HAGITA-KUN
... YEESH WHEN YOU PUT IT THAT WAY, I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE FINE, I'LL DO IT.
LET'S GO BACK IN.
WHAT'S NEXT AGAIN?
MATH

...
?
UM, OKAY..
I WANT YOU TO HANG OUT WITH ME FOR A B T
ON THE WAY HOME TODAY
HM?
HEY.
NAHO...
HOW ABOUT WALKING ME TO THE DOOR?
SUWA, I'LL SEE YOU AT THE CLUB
YEAH, SURE.
OKAY. TELL 'EM I GOTTA CLEAN UP HERE BEFORE I GO.

WE'RE ALONE.
AH...
I'M HAPPY.

YOU WALK SLOWLY, DON'T YOU, NAHO?
IT'S LIKE YOU'RE ALWAYS A PACE BEHIND WHOEVER YOU'RE WALKING WITH
O-OH, REALLY?
ALTHOUGH THAT IS JUST LIKE YOU...

STRANGE..
...BUT I'M HAPPY TO HEAR IT
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT WAS A COMPLIMENT OR ANYTHING...
THE WIND'S GOTTEN COOLER, HUH?
YEAH!
KAKERU IS NOTICING EVEN THE SMALLEST DETAILS ABOUT ME.

GRAB
TWIST
!
ARE YOU OKAY?!
S...
SORRY!

I'M SORRY.
WHAT SHOULD I DO? I GRABBED RIGHT ONTO KAKERU
EVEN WITH OTHER PEOPLE AROUND.
HOW EMBARRASSING

...
WHAT ?
...
NOTHING
NOTHING, REALLY

?
WELL, I'M OFF TO THE CLUB
BYE BYE.
WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT .?
WAS KAKERU GOING TO SAY SOMETHING?
RUSTLE RUSTLE
I WONDER IF THE LETTER HAD SOMETHING TO SAY
ABOUT THIS
...
THAT'S RIGHT. I LEFT IT AT THE HOUSE.
I DECIDED NOT TO RELY ON IT YET NOW, WITHOUT THINKING
Sigh...

I'LL TRY TO DO SOMETHING ON MY OWN
HUFF
HUFF
UHUHU
YOU DON'T NEED TO PRACTICE ANY MORE.
HOW CAN I RUN EVEN FASTER?
HEY I GOT FASTER RIGHT?
THAT WAS FASTER THAN BEFORE WASN'T IT?
WOW! YOU'RE GETTING FASTER AND FASTER!
IN FACT, I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU WANTED ME OUT HERE WITH YOU.
THE OTHERS ARE FASTER, SO YOU SHOULD HAVE THEM COACHING YOU.

...
...
WHY IS IT US TWO?
THAT WOULDN'T REQUIRE JUST THE TWO OF US.
WHAT?
I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD PRACTICE, TOO.

THERE'S SOMETHING ..
.. I WANNA TELL YOU.

I'LL TRY ASKING KAREEU TOMORROW
HEY
HANG OUT WITH ME WHILE I PRACTICE TOMORROW, TOO
WHAT?!

KAKERU..
CAN I WALK YOU TO THE DOOR?
SURE .
I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D ASK ME, NAHO.
U... YEAH
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
I SEE .
ME, TOO.

I'LL TRY ASKING HIM...
"HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED?"

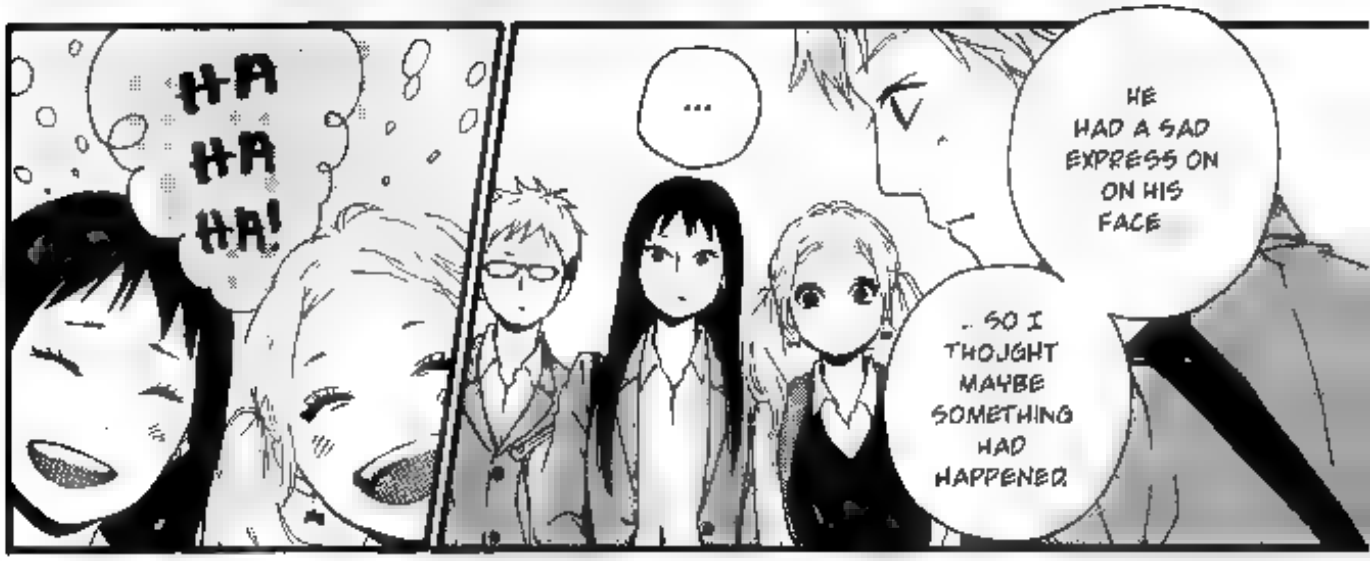
..KAKERU?
...WRONG...
WHAT'S
NOTHING.
SORRY
WELL..
BYE BYE.
SEE YOU
TOMORROW.
KAKERU .
WHAT'S
WRONG?
I'M SORRY
I COULDN'T DO
ANYTHING

SUWA .
DID YOUR LETTER SAY ANYTHING..
.. ABOUT KAKERU TODAY?
SUWA ..
I SEE...
NOPE.
NOTHING FOR TODAY.
BUT I THOUGHT...
. YOU WEREN'T GONNA RELY ON THE LETTER FOR NOW.
...
TRUE
BUT, I'M WORRIED ABOUT KAKERU

...AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.
RELY ON US, TOO.
DON'T PUT ALL YOUR CHIPS ON THE LETTER.
YOU'VE GOT THESE GUYS RIGHT BEHIND YOU
EVERY-ONE
WHAT'S WRONG?

WHY NOT TRY TALKING WITH THEM?
YOU'RE TROUBLED
...ABOUT KAKERU?
WELL... UH.
YEAH?
KAKERU'S BEEN ACTING...
...A LITTLE WEIRD

LIKE THIS.
HE HOLDS OUT HIS HAND AND DOESN'T SAY A WORD
AND WHAT I ASK HIM WHAT IT'S FOR, HE WON'T ANSWER
ACTING WEIRD, YOU SAY?
HE MAY HAVE SOMETHING WE GHING ON HIS MIND


HA HA HA!
...
HE HAD A SAD EXPRESS ON ON HIS FACE
. SO I THOJGHT MAYBE SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED

I'M PRETTY SURE .
. KAKERU JLST WANTED TO HOLD HANDS WITH YOU.
?

HOLD HANDS WITH ME?!
HOLD HANDS WITH THE POOR GUY!
OF COURSE HE'D LOOK SAD!
...
EH?!
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT
YEAH, SAME.
NOT VERY MANLY OF KAKERU, THOUGH.
I WOULD'VE SAID RIGHT OUT, "HEY, LET'S HOLD HANDS."
IS THAT WHAT IT WAS?
IT MEANT HE WANTED TO HOLD HANDS
I TOLD YOU BEFORE, THERE'S NOTHING YOU HAVE TO HIDE FROM US.
THAT'S RIGHT. TALK TO US MORE!
YOU BOTH OVERTHINK THINGS ALONE.
THAT'S SOMETHING YOU AND KAKERU HAVE IN COMMON

NOTHING TO HIDE
WHY NOT TELL THEM EVERYTHING?
"ARE YOU HIDING SOMETHING FROM US?"
IF I TOLD THEM ALL ABOUT THE LETTER?
I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT BEFORE. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
BUT I FIGURED YOU'D NEVER BELIEVE ME, EVEN IF I TOLD YOU.
WE'LL BELIEVE YOU, SO TELL US!
I'M NOT ESPECIALLY HIDING IT...
ABOUT KAKERU!

PUT SIMPLY..
. I GOT A LETTER..
SO.
. .FROM MYSELF, TEN YEARS IN THE FUTURE.
WHAT KIND OF REACTION IS THAT?
I CAN'T READ THAT EXPRESSION
.. FROM MY FUTURE SELF
I GOT A LETTER .

I WONDER IF THEY'LL BE SHOCKED.
IT SAID, "I WANT YOU TO SAVE KAKERU."
MAYBE THEY'LL LAUGH AT ME.
MAYBE THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME.
THAT'S WHY I WANT ALL OF YOU TO HELP ME...
SURE.
OF COURSE WE WILL
YOU FINALLY ASKED US FOR HELP.
LET'S GO OUTSIDE AND TALK.
THERE'S SOMETHING WE WANNA SHOW YOU.
THEY GET IT..!

HOW...?
Takako Chino
Azusa Mumasaka
HAGITA!
HAGITA, TOO. YESTERDAY AT THE PARK, HE SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING HE WANTED TO TELL ME.
YESTERDAY? AT THE PARK?
WE GOT LETTERS FROM THE FUTURE, TOO.
SORRY FOR KEEPING QUIET ABOUT IT

HE SAID HE GOT ONE, TOO.
Saku Hagita
ALL OF US
WHO IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD GO ON A DATE WITH THIS DUMBBELL?!
WHAT, WERE YOU TWO ON A DATE?
JUST GET THE LETTER OUT!
...GOT A LETTER
ALL OF US HAVE THE SAME GOAL.
LET'S SAVE KAKERU...

...TOGETHER!

...WHO WON'T HAVE CHANGED, EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW.

FRIENDS...

I HAVE FRIENDS.

TOGETHER

LET'S SAVE KAKERU...

1

the first volume

orange

ALL OF US HAD REGRETS ABOUT KAKERU.
IT WASN'T JUST ME AND SUWA
Mako Takaragi
Takako Chiba
Akiko Murasaka
Hiroko Suwa
Saki Nagita
I WONDER IF HE WOULD BELIEVE US
IF WE TOLD KAKERU.

CHAPTER 13

MORNING.

GOOD MORNING!
KAKERU, YOU LOOK MORE HANDSOME THAN USUAL TODAY!
WHAT THE HECK? COMING FROM YOU, YUCK!
SHE'S RIGHT. YOU'RE A HOTTIE!
WHAT ABOUT ME?!
NORMAL!
HEY!
HUH?

ISN'T THIS NORMAL?
About five pages...
HOW LONG IS YOURS, NAHO?
AREN'T ALL OF YOUR LETTERS KIND OF SHORT?
EH?
YOU THINK?
I GUESS THAT'S WHY MINE IS OVER TEN PAGES.
MINE HAS ENTRIES FOR INDIVIDUAL DAYS.
IT SAYS WHAT HAPPENS ON THAT DAY, WHAT I SHOULD DO, WITH LOTS OF DETAILS...
WHAT DO ALL OF YOUR LETTERS SAY?
WOW! THAT'S JUST LIKE YOU, NAHO!
EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW, YOU'RE A HARD WORKER.
Ha ha ha!
Ha ha ha!
Over ten pages!

THEY SAY TO "COOPERATE SO KAKERU AND NAHO CAN BE CLOSE FOREVER."
MY LETTER SAYS...
"SUPPORT NAHO, NOT UEDA-SEMPAI."
NAHO, I'M SORRY!
?
Good grief
AND YET, YOU WERE CHEERING UEDA-SEMPAI ON?
WELL, AFTER ALL...
..I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN THE LETTER THEN!

I THOUGHT IT WAS A PRANK AT FIRST.
I MEAN, THE LETTER ALSO SAYS THAT NAHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH KAKERU...
...BUT I NEVER THOUGHT NAHO WOULD FALL FOR ANYONE.
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...
BUT WHEN KAKERU STARTED GOING OUT WITH UEDA-SEMPAI...
...NAHO BEGAN ACTING WEIRD.
THAT'S WHEN...
...I FINALLY REALIZED THE LETTER WAS THE REAL DEAL.
AND I FELT BAD FOR NOT BEING SUPPORTIVE OF NAHO BACK THEN.
BUT FROM NOW, YOU'VE GOT MY FULL SUPPORT!
HUH?!
WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANY MORE REGRETS.
RIGHT

I THINK...
.. IT'S CONNECTED TO SAVING KAKERU.
Really?
I'LL BE FINE WITHOUT ALL YOUR SUPPORT!
HEY, WAIT!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I'M SURE YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN MAKE HIM HAPPY.
SAVING KAKERU?
ME...?
THAT'S SIMPLE.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I SHOULD DO.
...IT'S REALLY HARD.
BUT...

WHEN I SAY "GOOD MORNING" TO KAKERU...
...HE ISN'T ESPECIALLY PLEASED.
BUT WHEN YOU TELL HIM "GOOD MORNING," HE IS ESPECIALLY PLEASED.
GET IT?!
NO...
I GET IT.
A GUY IS HAPPY JUST TO GET A TEXT FROM THE GIRL HE LIKES.
SO EVEN A GREETING WOULD DO IT.
Though it's never happened to me...
IF I SEND KAKERU A TEXT...
...YOU THINK HE'LL BE HAPPY?
SURE I DO.

MY WHOLE MINDSET HAS CHANGED.
THE WORRIES I WAS CARRYING AROUND BY MYSELF NO LONGER SEEM SO REAL.
IT FEELS LIKE A WEIGHT HAS BEEN LIFTED OFF MY CHEST.
...AREN'T JUST MINE ANYMORE.
THE DOUBTS I HAD UP TO YESTERDAY...
I DIDN'T WANT TO STUMBLE INTO YOU AGAIN LIKE LAST TIME...
.. SO I THOUGHT I'D PUT THEM ON AFTER YOU MOVED AWAY.
...
WHAT'S UP NAHO? YOU'RE JUST STANDING THERE.
ARE YOU GOING TO CHANGE INTO YOUR SLIPPERS?
AH...
YEAH.

HUH?!
WHY DON'T YOU HOLD NAHO'S HAND?
KAKERU!
HOLD HER HAND TO SUPPORT HER.
WHA?!
EMBARRASSED LIKE THAT AGAIN
I DON'T WANT TO BE ..
I'M GOING ON AHEAD.
WHY SHOULD WE HOLD HANDS?
HE RAN AWAY.
Shut up.

KAKERU!
G...
GOOD MORNING!

...Huh?
YOU SAID THAT BEFORE, RIGHT?
WHY SAY IT AGAIN?
I KNOW, BUT...
I...
MY TIMING WAS, UM
Ha ha ha!
Ha!

IT'S TRUE.
AH...
HEY!
I BORROWED A BATON.
Let's practice!
Ahh!
...TOLD EVERYONE ABOUT HIS TROUBLES...
MAYBE IF KAKERU...
...IT WOULD LIGHTEN HIS LOAD.

NOTHING, REALLY!
WE WERE DECIDING ON THE ORDER OF THE RELAY RUNNERS.
GOTCHA!
SO EVERYONE FOLLOW MY LEAD, ALL RIGHT?
WHAT ARE YOU GUYS WHISPERING ABOUT?
OH...?
SO WHAT'S THE ORDER?
?
WELL...
?

Don't forget October 5th.
It's my birthday!

Azusa,
17 years old

After school that day, everyone will give you a birthday present. As I recall, right after you all decide to walk home together, it starts to rain.

Naho has her own folding umbrella and Kakeru says, "Let me under there."

By coincidence, Hagita's present to me is a folding umbrella, which I lend to Kakeru.

In the end, we walk home with Taka-chan and me sharing Naho's umbrella while Kakeru, Suwa, and Hagita share the one Hagita gave me.

I wonder what would've happened if I hadn't lent my umbrella.

AZU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
So don't let Kakeru borrow your umbrella!
AAAH! WHAT?! I HAD NO IDEA!

HEY, HAGITA
HM?
WHY'D YOU GIVE ME AN UMBRELLA?
YOU SHOULDN'T GIVE ME AN UMBRELLA!
I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE, SO JUST ROLL WITH IT!
WHAT, IS THIS?! IT'S SO CUTE!
THEN DON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT IT
AND THEY'RE OFF
THE BICKERING MARRIED COUPLE..
CHORTLE
AH.
RAIN.
WELL, THIS SUCKS.
SSSSHHHH
DRIP
DRIP

POP
POP
POP
WAIT.
WHY ARE ALL YOU GUYS CARRYING UMBRELLAS?
THE WEATHER REPORT CALLED FOR RAIN
IT DID NOT! IT SAID SUNNY!
LET ME SHARE WITH YOU.
FORGET IT!
WHY?
OKAY, THEN... HAGITA-KUN...
WHY NOT?
UGH... COME ON...

AZU! LEND ME YOUR UMBRELLA.
NO WAY!
WHY NOT? YOU JUST GOT A NEW ONE FROM HAGITA-KUN.
LET ME USE ONE OF THEM
NO!
I'M GOING TO TREASURE THIS, NOT USE IT!
DO YOU KNOW HOW RARE IT IS TO GET A PRESENT FROM HAGITA?
WHAT'S THE POINT IF YOU DON'T USE IT?
NEVER MIND!
KAKERU...

I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU.
I'LL SHARE WITH AZU...
WANT TO USE MINE?
HUH?
SHARE WITH ME...
LET'S WALK HOME TOGETHER.
EH ..?
UM...

SURE.
WALKING TOGETHER LIKE THIS...
NOW THAT'S A SHARED UMBRELLA!
A LITTLE FURTHER
MAYBE THIS'LL DO IT
..OUR SHOULDERS CAN'T HELP BUT BRUSH AGAINST EACH OTHER..
..MEANS THAT
#SSSSS

NAHO...
DON'T STAND SO FAR AWAY.
EH?
YOU'LL GET WET
EH?
SCOOCH CLOSER TO ME.
!
FWAP
MY FACE...
AAAH!

THE UMBRELLA...
S...
SORRY...
YOU STARTLED ME...

WITHOUT THE LETTER, THINGS DON'T GO SMOOTHLY.
SHALL WE TAKE SHELTER FROM THE RAIN?
THIS WON'T WORK.
OF COURSE NOT.

KAKERU... TRY USING THIS.
A HANDKERCHIEF
OH!
DON'T WORRY, IT'S A NEW ONE!
YOU USE IT, NAHO.
I HAVE ANOTHER ONE, SO
WAH ! TWO?
THANKS.
SORRY .
REALLY .
IT'S OKAY.
IT WAS MY FAULT, TOO.
YOU DIDN'T LIKE...
...SHARING AN UMBRELLA?

SORRY.
I WAS JUST NERVOUS.
THAT'S NOT IT.
IT'S THE MOST NERVOUS I'VE BEEN SO FAR ..
I DON'T THINK MY HEART HAS EVER BEATEN FASTER...
WE WERE SO CLOSE... OUR VOICES SO CLOSE...
IS THIS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN YOU'RE DATING?

WELL... IF IT IS...
IT WASN'T UNPLEASANT.
IT WASN'T UNPLEASANT FOR ME, EITHER.
SAME GOES FOR WHEN YOU LOST YOUR BALANCE...
WHILE PUTTING ON YOUR SHOES... AND GRABBED ME FOR SUPPORT

IT WASN'T A BOTHER AT ALL.
I I DOUBT IT.
I'M SURE THAT WAS A BOTHER
IN FACT...
..IT MADE ME PRETTY HAPPY.
WHAT AM I SAYING?
This is embarrassing...
KAKERU...

HE COMMUNICATES HIS FEELINGS SO CLEARLY.
KAKERU IS ALWAYS OPEN.
ALWAYS STRAIGHT-FORWARD.
"LET'S HOLD HANDS."
BUT HE WASN'T ABLE TO SAY,
MAYBE HE'S...
...JUST LIKE ME.
MAYBE KAKERU...
...WAS NERVOUS, TOO.

I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE...
...WHO WAS ANXIOUS ALL THE TIME.

I WON'T TAKE IT.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
AFTER ALL...
...WE ALREADY HELD HANDS AT THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL.
ONCE IS ENOUGH?

KAKERU...

SORRY.
HE'S BLUSHING.

...IF YOU DON'T SAY ANYTHING, I WON'T KNOW THAT YOU WANT TO!
WELL, AFTER ALL...

YOU USUALLY WON'T HOLD HANDS WITH ME...
...SO I WAS BEING MEAN.

...I BET I'M BLUSHING MORE THAN HE IS.
WANNA GO OUT?
BUT...
THAT'S OKAY.
IF YOU SAY, "LET'S GO OUT"...
HUH?
...THEN WE'LL GO OUT.

I'M HAPPY...
...EVEN IF WE DON'T GO OUT.

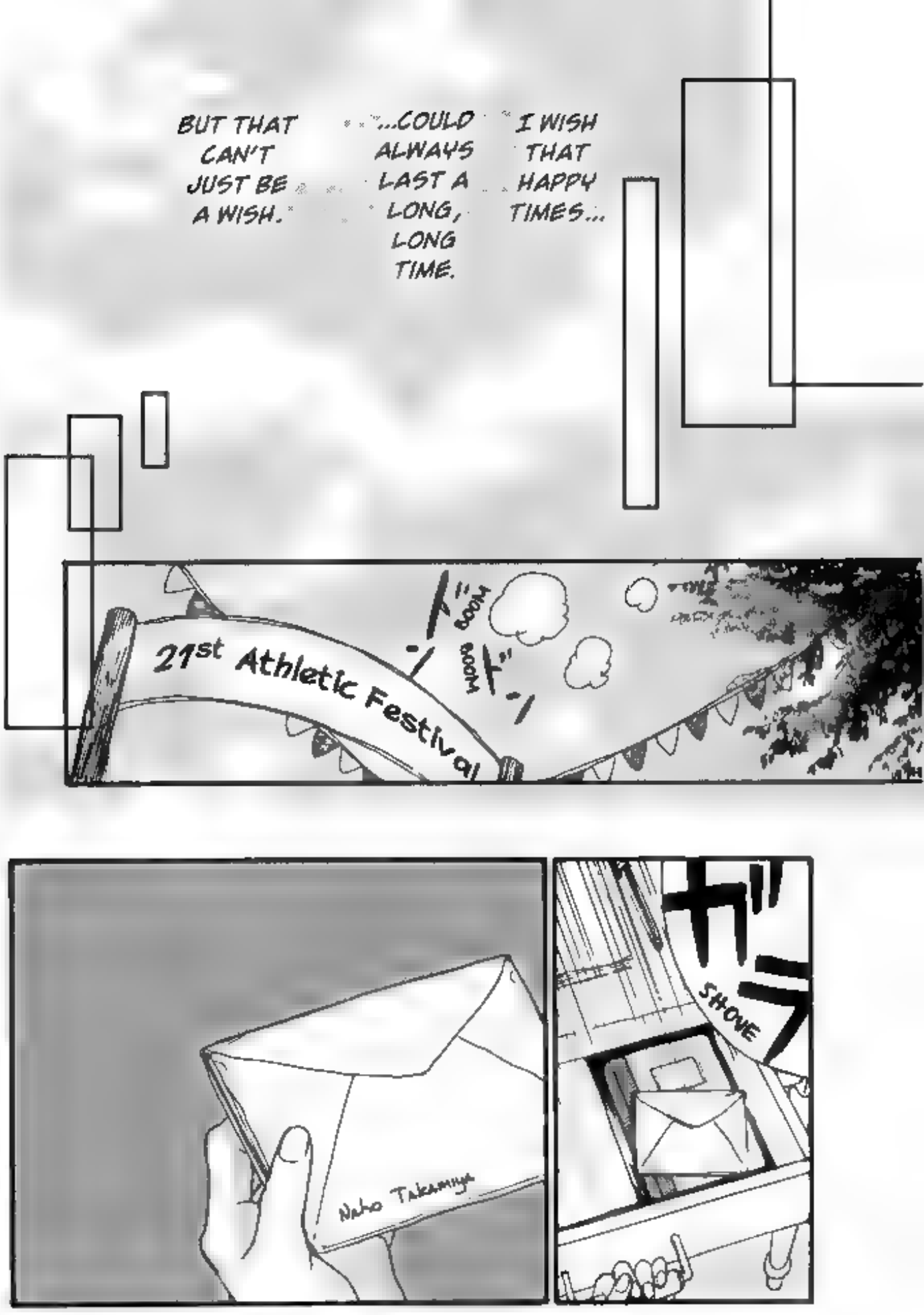
YEAH.
ME, TOO.
BUT THE TRUTH IS...

MAYBE THAT WOULD...
...MAKE US EVEN HAPPIER.
...I KIND OF WANT TO TRY GOING OUT WITH HIM.
CLOSER.
STEP
NAHO, COME OVER HERE MORE.
?!
CLOSER.
EH?
CLOSER.
CLOSER.

IF YOU DON'T DO A GOOD JOB DRYING YOURSELF, YOU'LL BE SOAKED.
AAAH!
WIPE
THAT'S OKAY! I'M FINE!
I'LL DRY MYSELF!
I WONDER HOW THOSE TWO ARE DOING.

GOOD POINT.
CONSIDERING THOSE TWO.
WITH THOSE TWO, WALKING TOGETHER UNDER ONE UMBRELLA IS A BREAK-THROUGH.
MAYBE THEY HAD A BREAK-THROUGH!
THEY ALWAYS WALK A CERTAIN DISTANCE APART...
. EVEN THOUGH THEY OUGHT TO BE CLOSER
SO...
...SEEING THEM LIKE THAT MADE ME HAPPY.

I JUST HOPE...
...WE GET TO SEE THEM LIKE THAT TEN YEARS FROM NOW.
ME, TOO.
SUWA, GIMME A FEW OF YOUR FRIES.
THAT'S MORE THAN A FEW!
THERE IT IS!
HAGITA'S MOOCH ATTACK!
CRAM


I WISH THAT HAPPY TIMES...
...COULD ALWAYS LAST A LONG, LONG TIME.
BUT THAT CAN'T JUST BE A WISH."
21st Athletic Festival
BOOM
BOOM
Naho Takamiya
SHOVE

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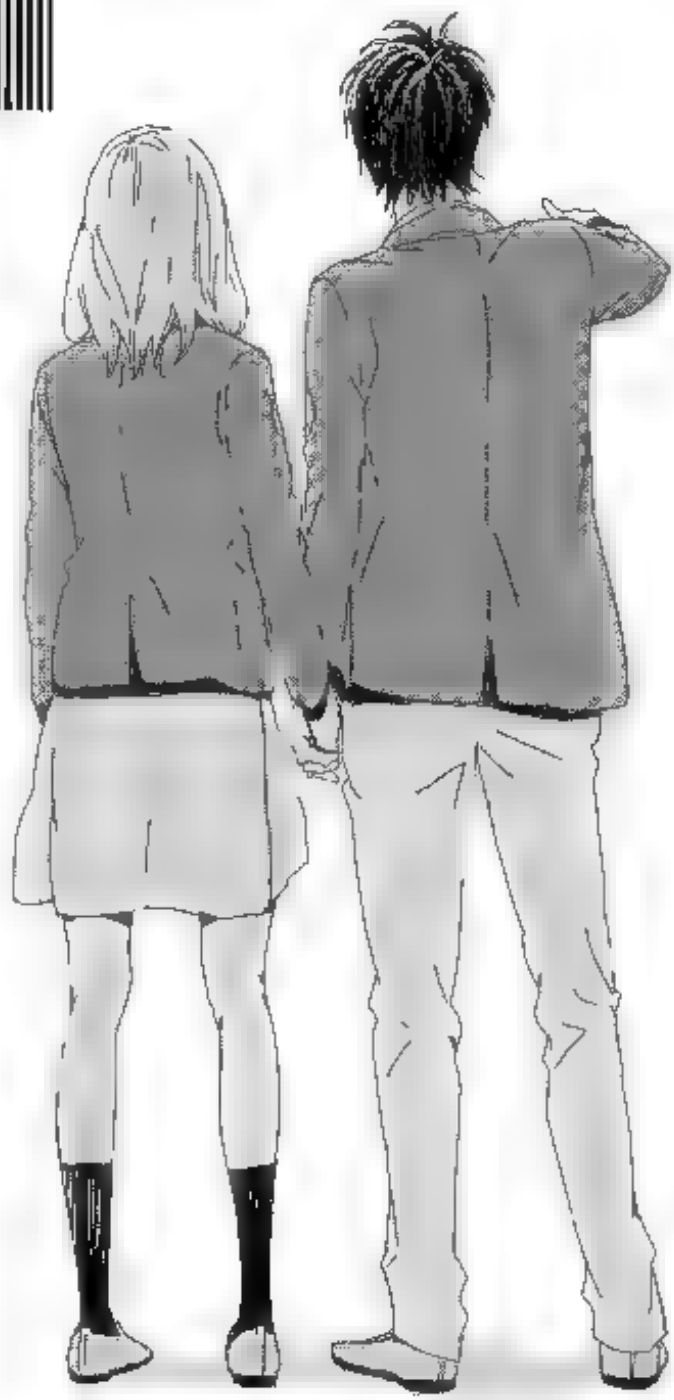
the first volume

orange



CHAPTER 14

Sign: 21st Athletic Festival
NAHO...
THE OPENING CEREMONY IS ABOUT TO START.
YEAH.
WHAT WERE YOU DOING?
THEY ASKED ME TO BE IN CHARGE OF FIRST AID, SO I WAS RUNNING AROUND FOR THAT.
A GOFER AGAIN? Ha ha ha!
HERE.
I'LL TIE IT FOR YOU.
HM?
HUH?

TH...
THAT'S...
IT'S FINE. JUST COME HERE.
WAA!
THERE.
GOT IT.
I FEEL LIKE...

DO MINE TOO, OKAY?
THANK YOU.
...THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US HAS SHRUNK.
SURE.
OCTOBER 14TH
THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
A SLIGHTLY HOT, CLEAR FALL DAY.
OUR CLASS IS IN RED.

MOM AND DAD CAME TO SEE IT.
LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING!
THEY LOOK SO NICE!
AWWW... NAHO'S PARENTS MAKE SUCH A GREAT COUPLE.
Ah! THERE THEY ARE!
NAHO...
YOUR MOM AND DAD ARE HERE.
HAGITA'S FOLKS ARE LIKE MIRROR IMAGES OF EACH OTHER!
ha ha ha!
THE ONE ON THE RIGHT! YOU KNOW THAT!
WHICH ONE IS YOUR MOM, AGAIN?
Looks like he's an actor and she's a model!
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN TAKAKO'S PARENTS.
HA HA!
MOM, THOSE SUNGLASSES ARE TOO BIG!
AH! AZU, I FOUND YOUR MOM AND LITTLE SISTER!
WORKING
Baking bread.
WHERE'S YOUR DAD?

SUWA, AZU, TAKA-CHAN, AND HAGITA-KUN ALL HAD FAMILY MEMBERS THERE TO WATCH, BUT NO ONE FROM KAKERU'S FAMILY CAME.

AND MY GRANDMA'S AROUND, BUT I DIDN'T BOTHER TELLING HER ABOUT IT.
MY PARENTS DIVORCED WHEN I WAS IN KINDERGARTEN, AND MY DAD IS TOTALLY OUT OF THE PICTURE.
MY MOM IS WORKING TODAY.

KAKERU SAID HIS MOTHER WAS WORKING. HIDING THE TRUTH FROM US

KAKERU SEEMED DOWN DURING THE WHOLE FESTIVAL.

ON TOP OF THAT. HE FELL DURING THE RELAY. I'M SURE THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL DIDN'T BECOME A PLEASANT MEMORY FOR HIM.

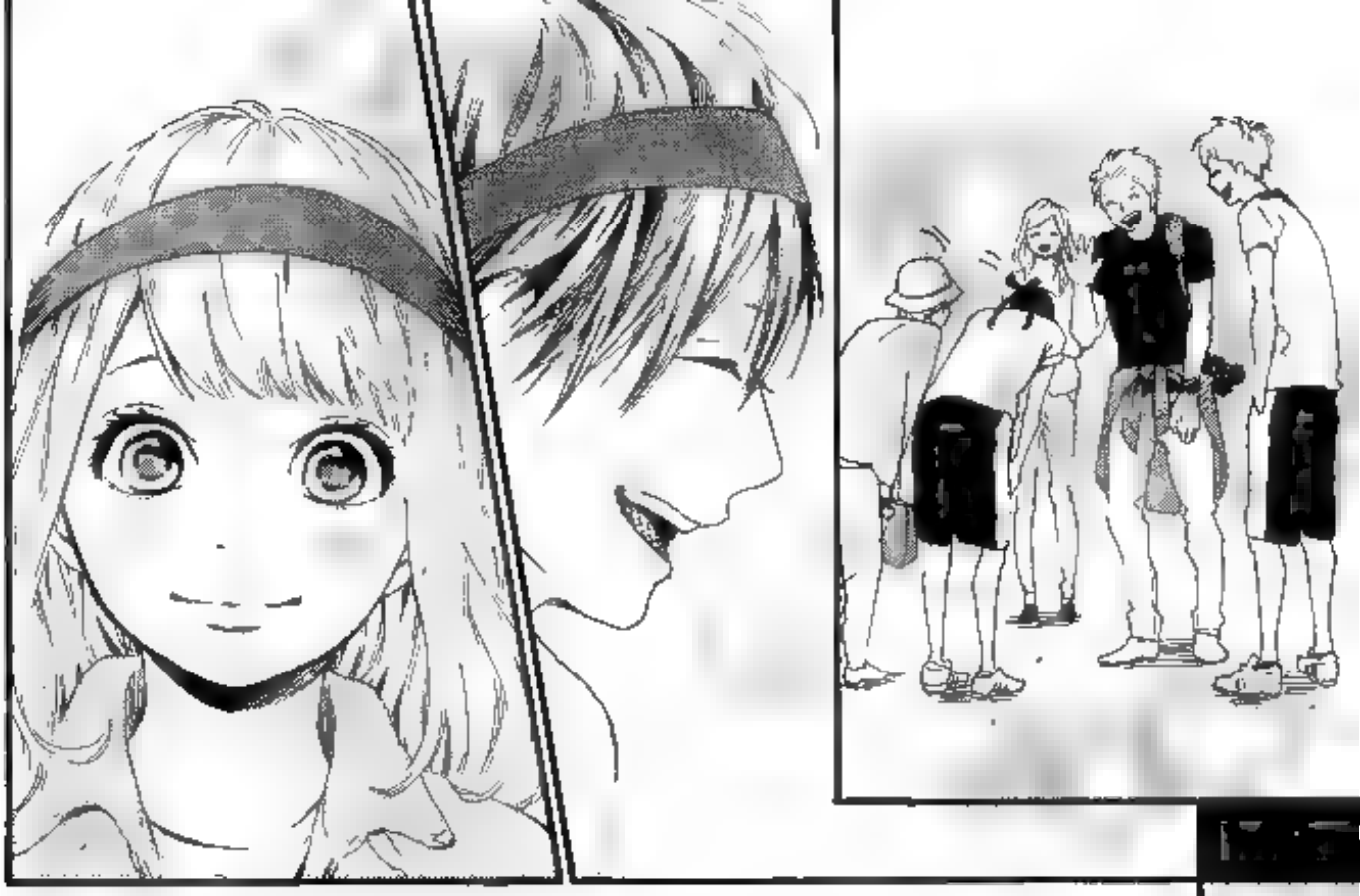
I'LL NEVER FORGET THE LOOK ON KAKERU'S FACE AFTER THE RELAY. HE WAS ALMOST AT THE POINT OF TEARS.

THE BLUE TEAM WON THE COMPETITION.

BRING A RELATIVE OF KAKERU'S TO THE FESTIVAL.

MAKE SURE HE HAS FUN, AND DOESN'T FEEL LIKE CRYING.

YOU GUYS LIVE FAR FROM HERE, AND I HEARD YOUR GRANDMA DOESN'T DRIVE, SO...
MY DAD ASKED HER IF SHE WANTED A LIFT.
?
I WAS INVITED.
HIROTO ASKED ME TO CALL HER.
YEAH!
THANK YOU. YOU MADE MY DAY!
DID I DO OKAY?
YOU DID, SUWA?



I'M SO RELIEVED.

IT LOOKS LIKE FOLLOWING THE LETTER'S ADVICE HAS WORKED OUT THIS TIME.

GOOD.

AND NOW, THE SECOND-YEAR TUG OF WAR.

ALL SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS, PLEASE GATHER AT THE DESIGNATED AREA.

SUWA DID HIS PART.

NOW IT'S MY TURN TO STEP UP.

I HOPE KAKERU HAS A GOOD TIME.

WHAT IS IT, MOM?
NAHO!
I DON'T NEED ALL THAT!
DO YOU HAVE A HANDKER-CHIEF AND TISSUES?
I'VE ALREADY GOT A HAND-KERCHIEF AND TISSUES.
AND BAND-AIDS?
Here.
.. WHICH ONE OF THOSE BOYS DO YOU LIKE?
TELL YOU WHAT, I'LL TAKE THE BAND-AIDS.
ALSO .
GLANCE
I DON'T LIKE...
...ANY OF...
WHY?!
EH?!

HE'S LOOKING OVER HERE!!
And she's looking over there!!
I SEE. THAT BOY, HUH?
AAAAH!

KAKERU!
WHAT'S WRONG?
I KEPT CALLIN' YOUR NAME. YOU COULDN'T HEAR ME?
HUH?

WHAT?
DO YOU FEEL SICK?
DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD. BE HONEST.
SORRY.
I WAS SPACING OUT.
I'M FINE!
ARE YOU SURE?

...HUH?
TWEET
THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND-YEAR TUG OF WAR ARE...
TWO WINS FOR BLUE, ONE WIN FOR YELLOW, ZERO WINS FOR RED!
AS OF RIGHT NOW, THE BLUE TEAM IS IN THE LEAD!

WE LOST BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE!
EVEN WITH ME THERE, WE COULDN'T DO IT.
SO FRUS-TRATING!
DAMMIT! WE LOST!
KAKERU...

ARE YOU FEELING DOWN?
ニコ
SMILE
KAKERU!
YOUR GRANDMA'S CALLING FOR YOU.
I WONDER WHY.
?
THANKS, SUWA.
NO PROB

I THINK...
...HE WISHES HIS MOM COULD BE HERE TODAY.
I KNOW. HE LOOKS GLOOMY.
IS KAKERU OKAY?
IT'S PROBABLY HARD TO BELIEVE A LETTER LIKE THAT AT FIRST.
YEAH
ME, TOO... I'M SORRY.
I'M SORRY. IF I'D BELIEVED THE LETTER, I COULD'VE CHANGED WHAT HAPPENED.
THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I INVITED HIM TO HANG OUT WITH US ON THAT FIRST DAY.
I GUESS HE'S HIDING WHAT HAPPENED TO HER...
...FROM US.
KAKERU SAID...
.. HIS MOM IS WORKING TODAY, RIGHT?

IF KAKERU WON'T TELL US WHAT HE'S FEELING...
...HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT TO DO FOR HIM?
KAKERU.
ARE YOU UNDER THE WEATHER?
YOU LOOK A LITTLE OUT OF SORTS.
HUH?
REALLY?
I FEEL FINE.

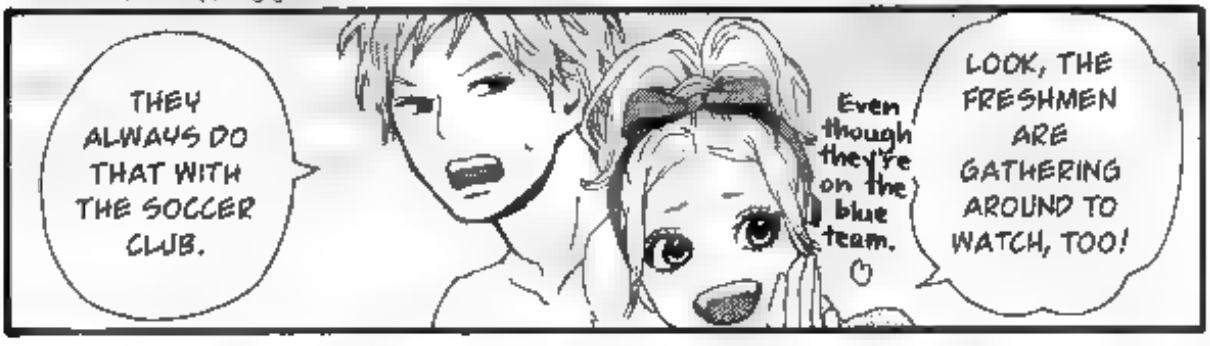
OH? WELL, IF YOU SAY SO...
SUWA-SAN SAID HE'S TAKING SOME PHOTOS OF YOU.
I'M CAPTURING ALL OF YOUR MANLY MOMENTS, KAKERU-KUN!
SO KEEP IT UP FOR THE NEXT EVENT!
SERIOUS-LY?!
That's kind of embar-rassing...
...I'VE ONLY BEEN TO ONE OF YOUR ATHLETIC FESTIVALS, WHEN YOU WERE IN KINDERGARTEN.
BEFORE THIS..
YEAH.
YOU CAME TO TOKYO TO SEE IT.
I WANT YOU...
...TO HAVE A GOOD TIME TODAY, KAKERU.
BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER'S WATCHING, TOO.

I'VE ALSO ALWAYS FELT REGRET...

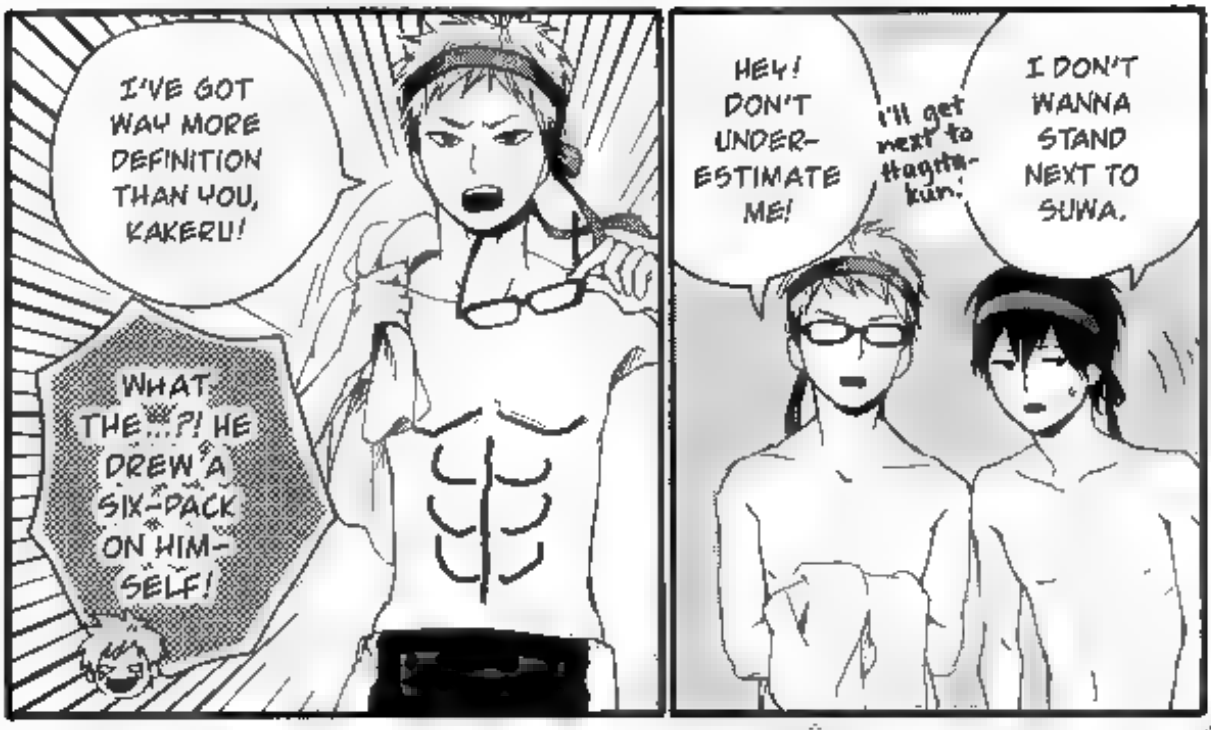
...THAT WE COULDN'T SAVE KAKERU'S MOM.

ALL THE GIRLS COME TO THIS FESTIVAL JUST SO THEY CAN WATCH THE BO-TAOSHI EVENT!
WE'RE TOTALLY NOT!
QUIT MAKIN' FUN OF ME.
HUH?
KYAA!
Suwa-senpai is a hunk!
He's so hot!

bo-taoshi pole-toppling game


THEY ALWAYS DO THAT WITH THE SOCCER CLUB.
Even though they're on the blue team.
LOOK, THE FRESHMEN ARE GATHERING AROUND TO WATCH, TOO!

I... I AM NOT!
YOU'RE EMBARRASSED.
YOU'RE BLUSHING DOWN TO YOUR NECK.
THAT'S JUST SUNBURN!


I'VE GOT WAY MORE DEFINITION THAN YOU, KAKERU!
WHAT THE...?! HE DREW A SIX-PACK ON HIMSELF!
HEY! DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME!
I'll get next to Hagita-kun!
I DON'T WANNA STAND NEXT TO SUWA.

PFFT
HA HA HA!
WAIT A SECOND. PERMANENT MARKER?
SO THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED THE PERMANENT MARKER FOR!

KAKERU...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
MMF...
KAKERU...
THAT'S NOW WHAT I MEANT.
I KNOW I DON'T HAVE MUSCLES LIKE SUWA, AND I CAN'T BE RELIED ON FOR...
HUH?
NOT THAT.
DO YOU THINK I LOOK WEAK?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

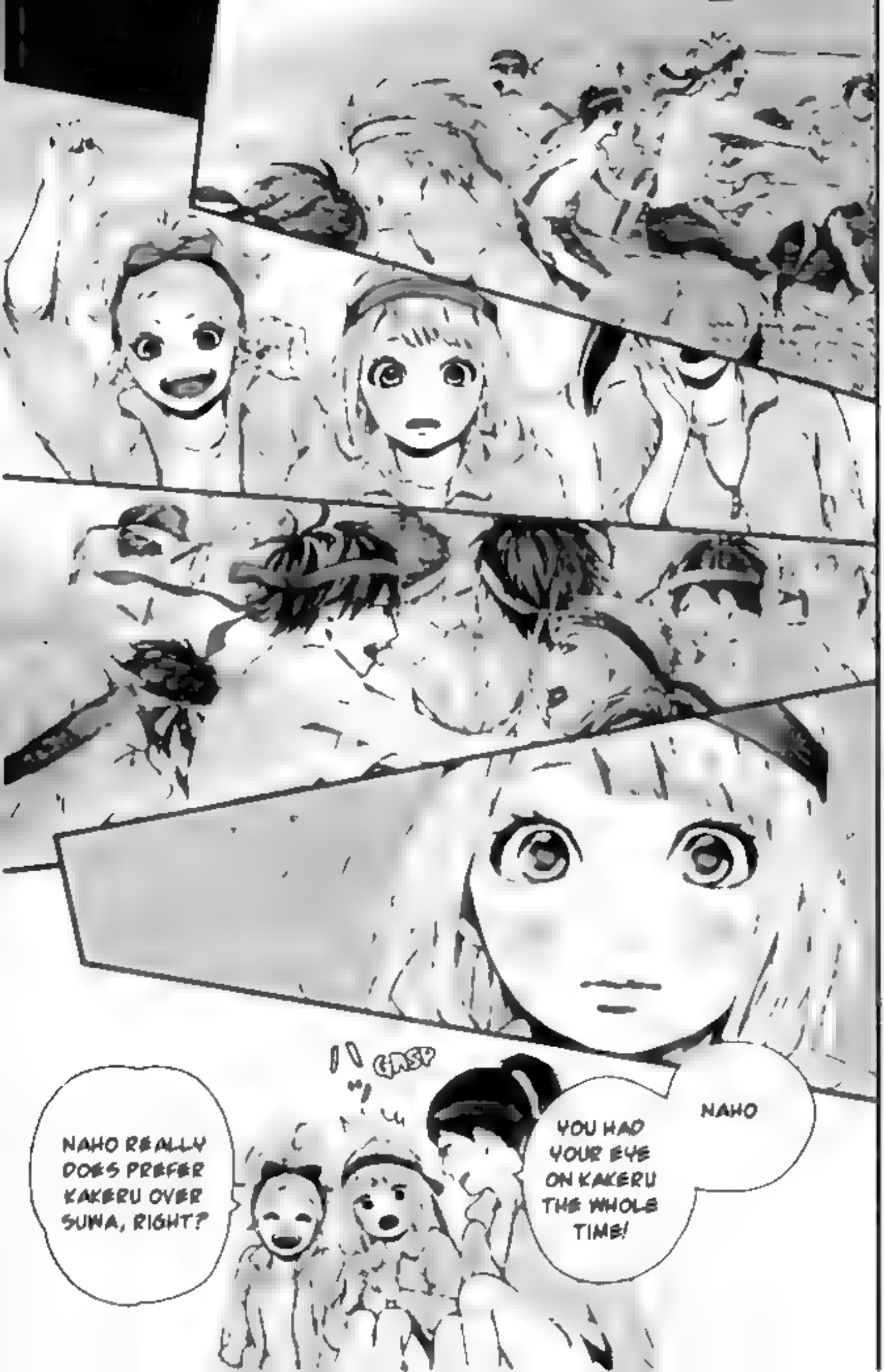
TH...
THAT'S CLOSE
SORRY.
Hug him, you dolt!
IN JUST A MOMENT THE BOYS' BO-TAOSHI EVENT WILL BEGIN.
ALL BOYS PLEASE ASSEMBLE AT THE CENTER OF THE GROUNDS.

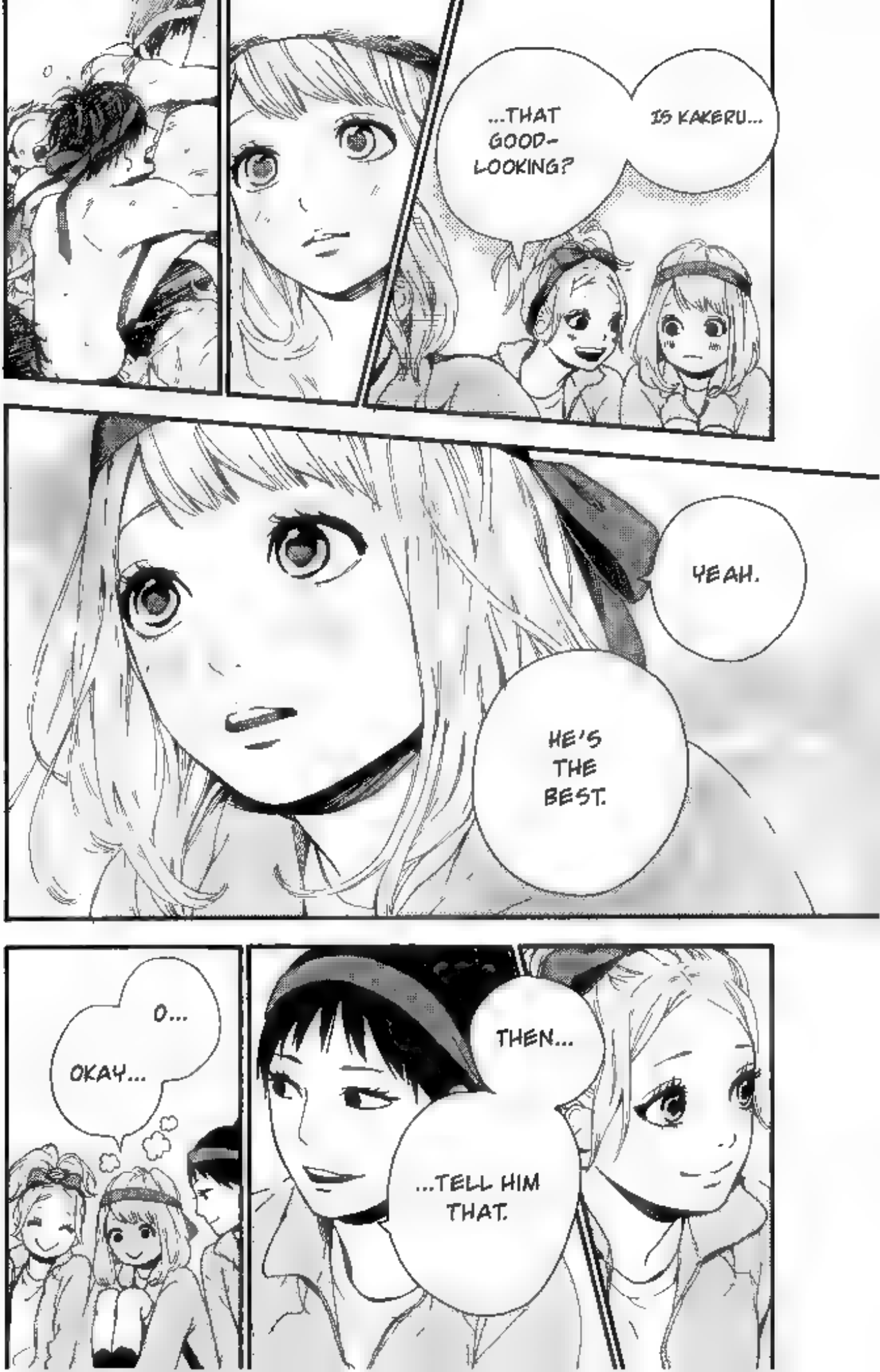
THIS TIME...
...THE LETTER'S ADVICE DIDN'T WORK WELL, EITHER
...I BET KAKERU WASN'T ABLE TO STAY FOCUSED FOR THE RELAY, EITHER
IF HE WAS LIKE THIS THEN
I WANT TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP...
...BEFORE THE RELAY STARTS.
HEY, KAKERU.

WELL, WHAT IF SOME OTHER GUY TELLS HER HE'S IN LOVE WITH HER?
WORRIED?
AREN'T YOU WORRIED SHE'LL START DATING SOMEONE ELSE?
ABOUT NOT GOING OUT WITH NAHO.
AREN'T YOU WORRIED?
AFTER ALL...
...I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'LL BE HERE.
I'D BE MORE WORRIED IF WE DID DATE.
OH, THAT.
WHY'S THAT?

AND THAT'D BE HARD ON NAHO.
I MIGHT MOVE AGAIN.
MAYBE TO TOKYO... MAYBE SOMEWHERE FARTHER AWAY.
IF WE STARTED DATING, I MIGHT SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR.
ARE YOU TELLIN' ME...
...THAT'S WHY YOU TWO AREN'T GOIN' OUT?
KAKERU.
HOW DO YOU REALLY FEEL?
WHAT IF YOU DID GO AWAY AND SOMEBODY ELSE SNATCHED UP NAHO?

YOU WOULDN'T MIND...
...IF I WENT OUT WITH NAHO?
NOPE.
IN FACT, I THINK THAT'D BE A GOOD IDEA.


NAHO
YOU HAD YOUR EYE ON KAKERU THE WHOLE TIME!
GASP!
NAHO REALLY DOES PREFER KAKERU OVER SUNA, RIGHT?


...THAT GOOD-LOOKING?
IS KAKERU...
YEAH.
HE'S THE BEST.
O...
OKAY...
THEN...
...TELL HIM THAT.

I HAVE TO GET THAT ACROSS...
...SO I DON'T HAVE REGRETS LATER.
THE RED TEAM WINS!
OW...
THAT HURTS
SUWA!
ARE YOU OKAY?!
BLAME THE WOODEN POLE.
YOU'RE ALL SCRATCHED UP!

I CAN'T SEE A THING WITHOUT MY GLASSES.
THEN WHY DID YOU TAKE THEM OFF?
SUWA'S TALL AND LOOKS STRONG.
...SO IT SEEMS THE SENIORS TARGETED HIM
HAGITA, YOU DON'T HAVE A SCRATCH!
THERE'S A FIRST-AID STATION, RIGHT?
IT'S GOTTA BE AROUND HERE.
NAH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME. I'll just go wash up.
I KNOW WHERE IT IS.
I'M IN CHARGE OF FIRST-AID!
OWWW!

I'M ALMOST DONE...
...SO JUST HANG IN THERE.
I CAN'T TAKE THIS SPECIFIC TYPE OF PAIN!
WIMP.
SORRY.

AH!
ARE YOU HURT?
HOW ABOUT YOU, KAKERU?
LET ME SEE IT!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
BUT WE SHOULD STILL PUT A BAND-AID ON IT!
OH... THIS IS NOTHING.
YOU'VE GOT A SCRAPE ON YOUR ARM!

I SAID...
...I'M FINE!
...
SORRY...
STEP

...SUWA?
WHAT SHOULD I DO...
KAKERU NEEDS TO HAVE FUN TODAY, AND YET...
DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?
AS A MATTER OF FACT
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT, NAHO.
...I THINK THIS IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

"YOU WOULDN'T MIND...
...IF I WENT OUT WITH NAHO?"

"IN FACT, I THINK THAT'D BE A GOOD IDEA."

"NOPE."

I SAID THAT, AND YET I FEEL SO...

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TAKANO ICHIGO

ART OR COMICS

CHAPTER 15

HEADS UP!
THESE ARE OUR UNIFORMS FOR THE CHEER-OFF!
THE RED TEAM'S DOING A CHEERLEADER THEME! CUTE OR WHAT?!
NOT AT ALL!
YOU DJMBO!
OF COURSE YOU'RE NOT CUTE!
NOT REALLY

MAN, THOSE SKIRTS! DID YOU SEE HOW SHORT...?!
SO FRIGGIN' SHORT!
HEH
LET'S GO.
THOSE JERKS.
AT LEAST BE NICE AND SAY WE LOOK CUTE!

...WE'LL LEAD OFF WITH THE GIRLS' CHEERING BATTLE.
THIS AFTERNOON FOR THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL...
I DON'T WANT IT!
...SO I'LL GIVE YOU ONE OF AZU, HAGITA.
I TOLD MY DAD TO GET SOME SHOTS...

I'LL GIVE YOU NAHO'S PIC, KAKERU
THANKS
I WONDER IF KAKERU WAS MAD
ARE THINGS REALLY OKAY

NA...
HEY!

...
Sorry... Another odd job...
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO CARRY.
TAKAMIYA, NARUSE ..

ACCORDING TO NAHO'S LETTER, AFTER KAKERU FELL AND WE LOST, HE BLAMED HIMSELF, RIGHT?
IT'D BE WEIRD IF WE SAID BEFORE THE RACE, "DON'T WORRY IF YOU FALL," HUH?
HUH? WHERE ARE NAHO AND KAKERU?
THEY WERE ENLISTED.
I HOPE WE CAN PULL OFF THE RELAY..
I THINK...
...KAKERU'S LEG IS ALREADY HURT.
.. IT'S NOT LIKE THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH TO CHANGE THE FUTURE.
EVEN IF WE SAID, "CAREFUL YOU DON'T FALL"
SO SO WHAT DO WE DO?

NO...
IT'S IN MY LETTER.
DID KAKERU SAY ANY-THING?
YOU MEAN FROM THE POLE-TOP PLING?
NO WAY!
IT SEEMS HE DIDN'T TELL ANY OF US ABOUT BEING HURT.
HERE IT IS IN MINE...
THE FUTURE ME NOTICED IT BEFORE THE RACE...
...BUT KAKERU SAID HE WAS FINE, SO I DIDN'T STOP HIM.
WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING BEFORE?!
YOU WERE AT THE FIRST-AID STATION WITH HIM!
"WHY," YOU ASK...

ANYWAY, LET'S GET OVER TO HIM!
?
...
CARRYING A MATTRESS IS TOUGH WITH TWO PEOPLE
YEAH
IT'S HEAVY FOR ME, TOO.
LET'S PUT IT DOWN A SEC
UGH
THIS IS HEAVY
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, NAHO?
IDIOT.
TSK!

HOW DID YOU...?
...
...
TELL US!
YOUR LEG IS HURT?
WE DIDN'T REALIZE IT BEFORE.
HURT?
I'M SORRY.

KAKERU.
IS THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL BORING FOR YOU?
OH, IT'S...
...NO BIG DEAL..
...AND WONDERED IF SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED.
...
WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW DOWN YOU SEEM.
WHY?
NOT AT ALL.

IT'S MUCH BETTER THAN STEWING OVER THINGS ALONE
IT WAS THE SAME THING WITH ME.
WE'D ALL BE HAPPY TO LEND AN EAR.
"TALK TO US BECAUSE WE'RE GOOD FRIENDS."
"WE DON'T WANNA GO AROUND JUST SMILIN' AND NOT KNOWING THAT SOMETHIN'S WEIGHING ON YOUR MIND."
I'VE BEEN LYING TO YOU.
I'M SORRY..

THE REAL REASON...
...MY MOM'S NOT HERE...
...IS BECAUSE SHE'S DEAD.
SO THE REASON YOU'RE DOWN...
...IS THAT YOUR MOTHER COULDN'T COME TODAY?
...

I'M..
...NOT SURE IF IT'S OKAY FOR ME TO HAVE FUN.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
EVERY TIME WE'RE TOGETHER...
...YOU GUYS MAKE ME WANT TO LAUGH.

BUT I FELT LIKE I CAN'T BE THAT WAY TODAY
AFTER ALL, MY MOM COULD BE WATCHING THIS FROM SOME-WHERE.
IF SHE WERE STILL ALIVE, SHE PROBABLY WOULD'VE BEEN HERE.

SHE SHOULD NEVER HAVE DIED.
MY MOM MUST BE SAD RIGHT NOW, WHEREVER SHE IS.
SO I'M NOT SURE IT'S OKAY FOR ME TO LAUGH LIKE I DON'T HAVE A CARE IN THE WORLD.
I'M SURE KAKERU'S BEEN TORMENTED...
ALL THIS TIME
WITH REGRET AND A SENSE OF GUILT.

BUT IF YOUR MOTHER'S WATCHING THIS FROM SOME-WHERE ..
...TO ERASE THOSE FEELINGS?
WHAT CAN I DO..
...IT'S BETTER IF YOU DO SMILE, RIGHT?
THAT'S RIGHT
IF YOU'RE BUMMED OUT...
..YOJR MOTHER WILL WORRY ABOJT YOU, TOO.
WORRY ABOUT ME?
WHY?

YOU MAY NOT KNOW THIS...
SO FIGURE YOUR MOM IS EVEN MORE WORRIED THAN THAT.
...BUT WE'VE BEEN REALLY WORRIED ABOUT YOU.

NAHO'S THE ONE...
...WHO'S ALWAYS LOOKIN' AT KAKERU!
HE ALSO STARES AT YOU ALL THE TIME AND SIGHS.
EVERY TIME SUWA OPENS HIS MOUTH, IT'S "KAKERU THIS" AND "KAKERU THAT"
what is he, a guy?
I DO NOT!

IT'S TRUE...
I AM ALWAYS LOOKING AT YOU
THAT'S RIGHT! FORGET THE CONTESTS! SHE'S WATCHED KAKERU THE WHOLE TIME!
SHE'S SO WORRIED, SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HERSELF!
HUH?
UH...
I DO LOOK AT YOU
BUT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE.
WELL
WE'RE NOT TRYING TO FORCE YOU TO SMILE WHEN THINGS ARE ROUGH...

YEAH..
YOU'VE BEEN LOOKIN' FORWARD TO THE RELAY, RIGHT?
BUT..
...WHEN YOU'RE ACTUALLY HAVING A GOOD T ME, IT'S OKAY TO SMILE.
GO TO FIRST-AID, FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD.
YOU'RE NOT FINE.
IT DOESN'T HURT THAT MUCH.
I'M FINE.
...GET THAT LEG TREATED.
THEN BEFORE THE RACE STARTS...

THAT'S OKAY. I CAN CARRY THIS.
WE'LL CARRY THIS THE REST OF THE WAY.
GO WITH NAHO.
UH...
WE'RE TELLING YOU NOT TO OVERDO IT!
WE'RE HERE TO HELP.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO STRAIN YOURSELF AND CARRY THE WHOLE THING
IF IT'S HEAVY...

IT'S OKAY.
IF EVERYONE GRABS HOLD, IT'S LIGHT AS A FEATHER.

WE'RE ALL LOOKING AT YOU
I KNOW IT WON'T BE EASY
TO ERASE KAKERU'S SECRET AND ANGUISH
..BUT

...I HOPE WE CAN AT LEAST MAKE IT...
...A LITTLE LIGHTER FOR HIM.
SURE I CAN HE SAID IT WAS JUST A LIGHT SPRAIN.
SERIOUSLY? MAN, YOU CAN'T RUN ON THAT
A SPRAINED ANKLE?

HAGITA-KUN!
YOU AND YOUR "I'M OKAY"!
IT DOESN'T EVEN HURT NOW THAT IT'S TAPED UP!
See?
I CAN RUN LIKE CRAZY!
SENSEI SAID IT'S OKAY IF HE CAN RUN...
...BUT HE SHOULD PROBABLY SIT OUT OF THE RELAY, JUST IN CASE.
BUT HE SAID IT'S OKAY! DON'T SAY THE NEGATIVE PART!

REMEMBER, YOU'VE GOT THE CLUB.
IF YOUR ANKLE GETS WORSE, YOU MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE FOR A WHILE.
I'LL BE FINE.
ARE YOU SURE IT DOESN'T HURT? AND YOU CAN RUN?
I'M TOTALLY FINE.
I WON'T OVERDO IT.

I'M SURE I WON'T REGRET IT
WELL..
THEN SHALL WE.
...ALL RUN TOGETHER?
YOU'RE NOT HURT!
IT COULD BE A SPRAIN
MY ANKLE HURTS.
THIS IS GONNA BE FUN!
RIGHT, HAGITA?!
WHAT'S WRONG, HAGITA?

...THE CLASS RELAY RACE!
AND NOW WE COME TO THE FINAL EVENT OF TODAY'S ATHLETIC FESTIVAL...
GOOD LUCK!
AZU, NAHO, AND TAKA-CHAN, FIGHT!
WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU!
WIN THIS, NARUSE!

WHAT?
RUSTLE
1
2
CHEER FOR ME, TOO.
SUWA, TAKE FIRST PLACE!
KAKERU.

DO YOU...
...WANT TO SWITCH?
I MEAN...
LET'S SWITCH.

...A GREAT BIG SMILE.

...LET KAKERU HAVE...

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CHAPTER 16

SO YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS HAVE A GOOD TIME RUNNING.
THIS IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN TRAINING FOR, GUYS.
IT'S FINALLY TIME FOR THE RELAY!
WHY ME?!
AND SO, HAGITA...
...GIVE US A TEAM SPIRIT SHOUT.
YEAH!!
CLASS 6, FIGHT!
HOW IS HIS BETTER?
...
HEY HEY HO!!

YOU'D BETTER REMEMBER...
...THAT PROMISE.
HEY, AZU.
6
NO, WE'RE NOT GOIN' OUT!!
YOU TWO WERE PRACTICING TOGETHER AGAIN? ARE YOU GOING OUT?
WELL, YOU OUGHTA.
"THAT PROMISE"?
WHEN WE WERE PRACTICING AT THE PARK YESTERDAY...
...I PROMISED HIM A FREE TREAT FROM MY FAMILY'S BAKERY FOR EVERY PERSON HE PASSES IN THE RELAY.
5

WHY?!
IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES...
...THEN FINE.
LET'S SAY IF YOU PASS UP TWO OR MORE PEOPLE...
...YOU'LL GO OUT WITH AZU.

AND HOW ABOUT IF NAHO GIVES KAKERU SOME KIND OF REWARD?
DON'T ACT SO SHY.
NOT "FINE"!
THAT'S MORE LIKE A PUNISH-MENT!

...NAHO.
IF KAKERU CROSSES THE FINISH LINE IN FIRST PLACE, GIVE HIM A KISS...
GOTTA BE A KISS.
A KISS! A KISS!
A REWARD?
HUH?

I LIKE THE IDEA
BUT IF KAKERU DOESN'T TAKE FIRST PLACE .
.. I GET A KISS FROM NAHO!
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA.
What?!
THAT'S ASKING TOO MUCH.
You can tell by Naho's voice...

WHY THE HECK...?
?!

WELL, I'M DEFINITELY COMING IN FIRST.

WE'RE OVER THERE, NAHO.
IT'S GONNA START!
TH-THEY WERE JUST KIDDING, RIGHT?
TUBE
WE'LL DO OUR PART, TOO!
YOU'VE GOTTA COME IN FIRST!
!?
!?

WE'RE ALL TOGETHER.
NO ONE WILL BLAME YOU.
...IT WON'T BE YOUR FAULT, KAKERU.
EVEN IF SOMETHING HAPPENS..
YOU'RE NOT ALONE.
BANG
READY...

RUN!
LOOK AT SUWA GO!
WOW!
IN THE FIRST LEG, CLASS 6 IS IN THE LEAD
6
JUST DO YOUR BEST.
3
"DON'T LOSE!"
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!
TAKAKO!

CLASS 2 IS FAST! THEY'VE JUST PASSED CLASS 6 AND ARE NOW IN FIRST PLACE!
YOU CAN DO IT!
TAKAKO!
TCH!
DO YOUR BEST.
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!
"DON'T LOSE!"

"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
DO YOUR BEST!
6
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!

"DON'T LOSE!"
"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"
CLASS 6 HAS SLIPPED TO LAST PLACE!
AAAH!
I FIGURED HAGITA WOULD BLOW IT!
DO YOUR BEST!

DO YOUR BEST!
DO YOUR BEST!
PASS A MESSAGE... ON TO KAKERU!
"DON'T LOSE!"
"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"

"EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW!"
THANK YOU...

KAKERU!
...THE FUTURE!
I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM EVERYONE!
"DON'T LOSE!"
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"
"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"

"EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW..."
"...WE'LL BE..."
"...WAITING FOR YOU!"

WE'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU!

3
RIGHT NOW CLASS 2 IS IN THE LEAD!
THE ANCHORS ARE RUNNING THE FINAL LAP!
...AND ALL OF US WILL HELP YOU."
"IF THINGS ARE ROUGH, JUST SAY SO...
"I WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RELAY, TOO-"
"ME TOO."
"ME TOO!"
CLASS 6 IS CLOSING IN FROM BEHIND!
"I WANT TO RUN TOGETHER, TOO."
"IF IT'S HEAVY...
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO STRAIN YOURSELF AND CARRY THE WHOLE THING."
"ME TOO."

"WE'RE HERE TO HELP!"
2

YEAH!!!!
ワアア
CLASS 6 TAKES FIRST PLACE!
THANKS, KAKERU!
AMAZING!
YOU WERE GREAT, KAKERU!
KAKERU, THAT WAS AWESOME!
THAT WAS SO COOL, KAKERU!
KA-KERU...

YOU DID IT...
I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU.

...THE RED TEAM!
THE WINNER OF THE 21ST ATHLETIC FESTIVAL IS...

THE RELAY...
...WAS WONDERFUL.
CONGRAT-ULATIONS.
IT'S THANKS TO THEM
THIS REMINDS ME OF THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL WHEN YOU WERE IN PRESCHOOL.
IT DOES?
YOUR FATHER HAD JUST LEFT THE FAMILY...
...SO HE DIDN'T GO TO THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
YOU WERE BLUE THE WHOLE TIME.
YOUR MOTHER KEPT TAKING PICTURES...
...BUT SHE SAID SHE COULDN'T GET YOU TO SMILE FOR ONE OF THEM

I FEEL TERRIBLE ABOUT IT.
TO HAVE HIS PARENTS DIVORCE WHEN HE'S THAT YOUNG.
I HOPE KAKERU IS OKAY.
YOUR MOTHER...
...WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU THE WHOLE TIME.
WHEN YOUR MOTHER SAW THAT...
...SHE WAS SO HAPPY.
BUT...
...IN THE FINAL RACE...
...YOU WON FIRST PLACE, KAKERU.
YOU FINALLY...
...SMILED.

...SHE'S JUST AS HAPPY FOR YOU...
AND I'M SURE...
...RIGHT NOW.
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT.
...YEAH.

MAKE THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL SO MUCH FUN THAT KAKERU WON'T EVEN THINK OF CRYING.

IT WORKED OUT...

...THIS WAY.

...UNSURPRISINGLY...

...BUT...

NOT EVERYTHING THAT WAS IN THE LETTER WAS CORRECT...

NAHO!

BRING KAKERU'S FAMILY TO THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL, TOO.

...THE LETTER STILL...

...WASN'T WRONG.

CAN I KEEP IT?
AH!
THAT'S RIGHT!
ABOUT...
...THE HEAD-BAND...
SURE...
NO, I'M SORRY.
I MUST'VE SAID SOME-THING...
AH...
UM...
UH.. I'M SORRY ABOUT THE WAY I ACTED...
...AT THE FIRST-AID STATION.

YOU GAVE FIRST-AID TO SUWA...
...AND I FELT... HOW CAN I PUT IT?
THAT IT WASN'T FAIR...
THAT WAS JUST...
...?
NO, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, NAHO.
I... I SEE
SO THEN, YOU WEREN'T... ANGRY?
NO, I WASN'T ANGRY.
BUT REALLY... I GUESS I WAS JUST JEALOUS.
I'M SORRY.

AH! HOW'S YOUR SCRAPE?
I HAVE BAND-AIDS.
WANT ONE?
BANDAID
I SEE
KAKERU WAS JEALOUS

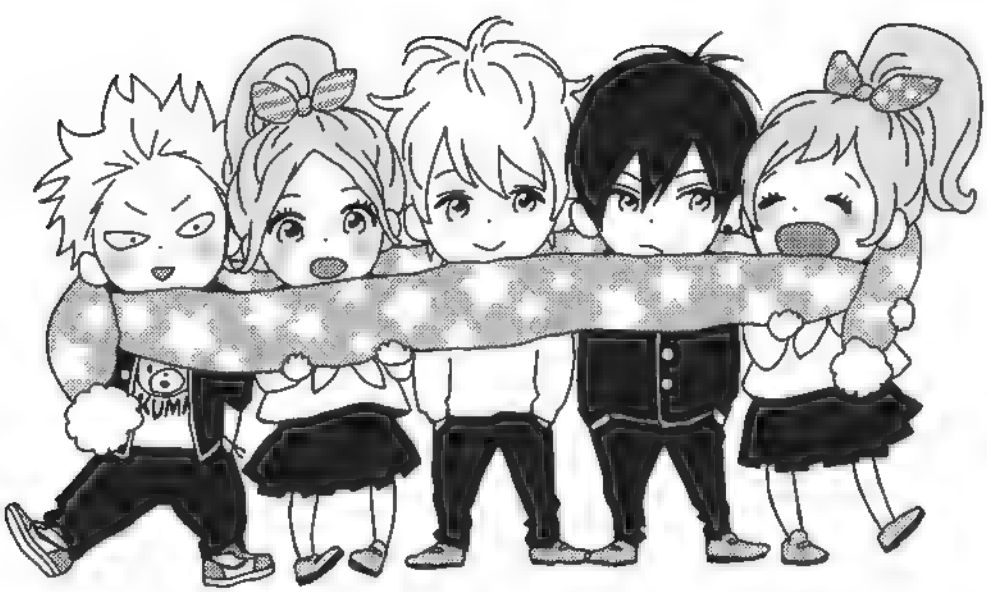
DOES IT HURT?
NO...

I GOT MY REWARD.
THANKS.

...A LOT.

...IS CHANGING...

THE FUTURE...



HARUIRO ASTRONAUT

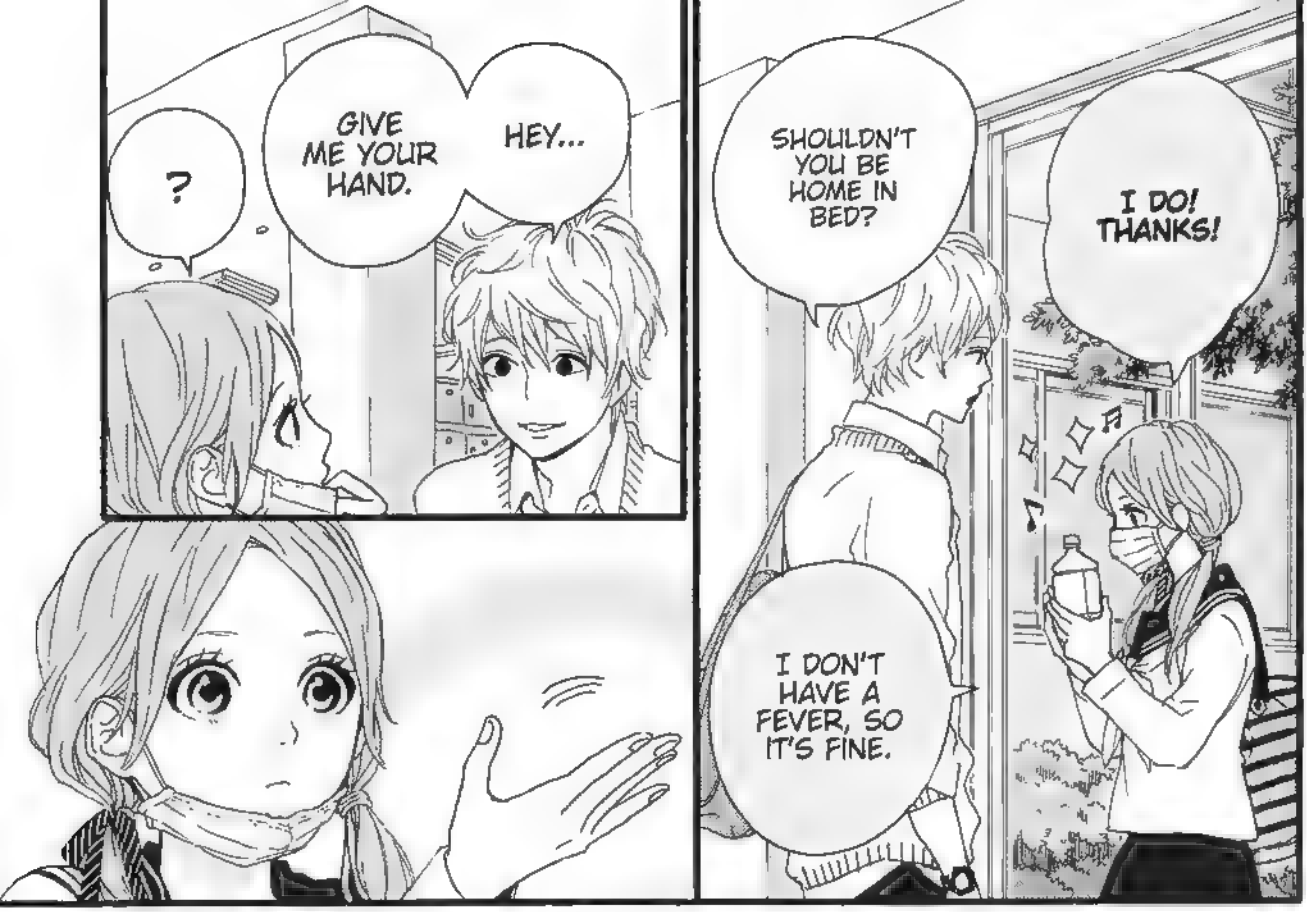
Haruiro Astronaut

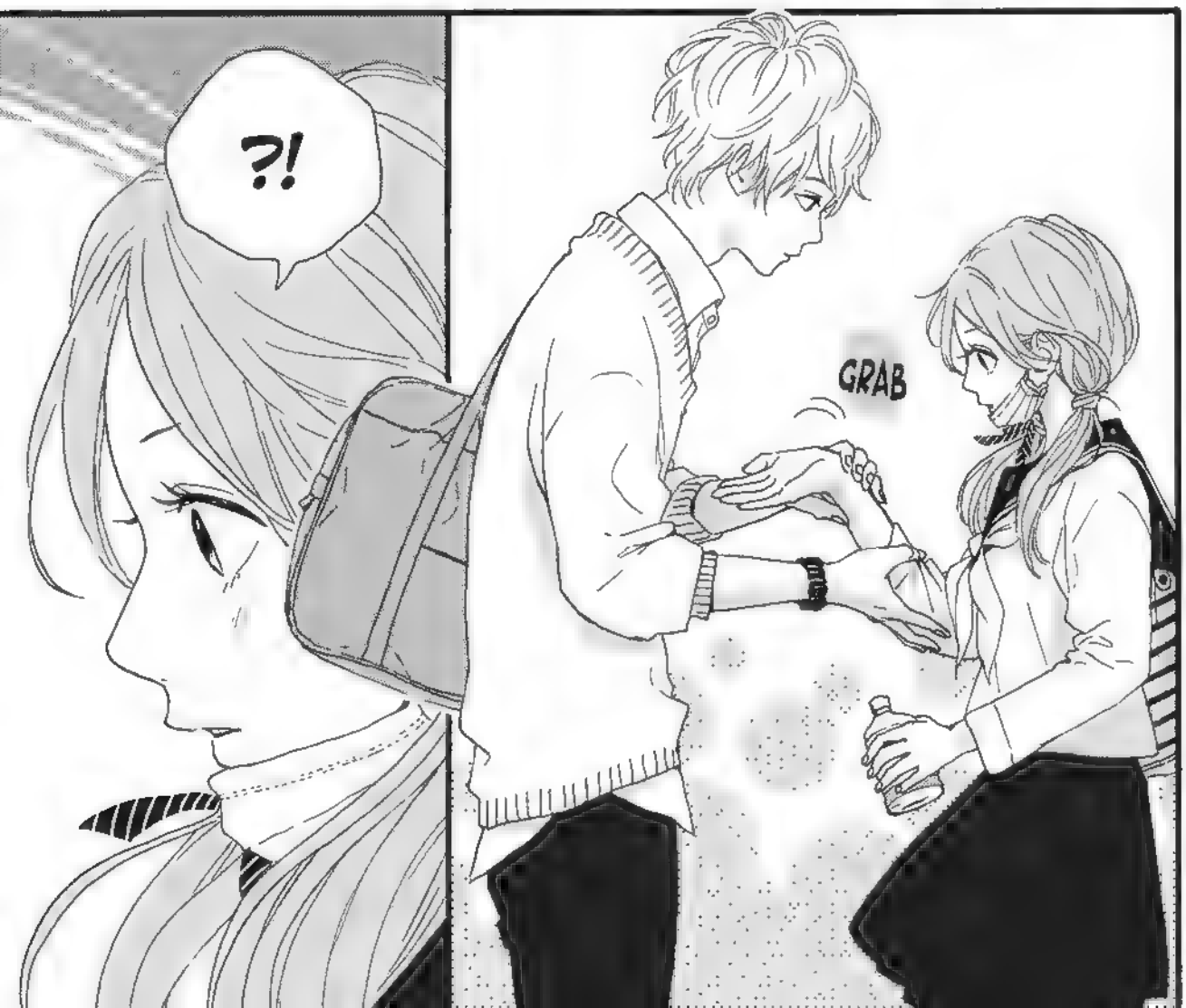
Chapter 4

COUGH
COUGH
I HATE BEING SICK!

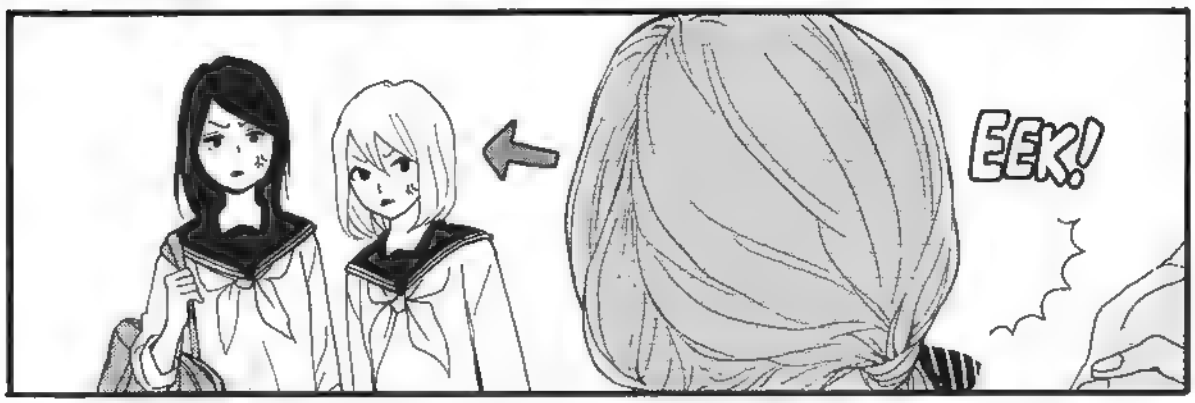
WANT SOME OF THIS?
HOT LEMON
Honey

GOOD MORNING, CHIKI-CHAN!
STILL DEALING WITH THAT COLD, EH?
HI, NATSUKI-KUN.


?
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.
HEY...
SHOULDN'T YOU BE HOME IN BED?
I DO! THANKS!
I DON'T HAVE A FEVER, SO IT'S FINE.


?!
GRAB

THEY SAY...
YOU CAN TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A FEVER BY THEIR PULSE.
TH-THIS IS...
THAT'S WHAT MY MOM SAYS ANYWAY. SHE'S A NURSE.
YOU COUNT THE BEATS FOR A MINUTE. IF IT'S HIGH, THEN YOU PROBABLY HAVE A FEVER.
THIS COULD BE BAD...


EEK!

SEE?!
IT IS BAD.

WHAM!
G'MORNING, NATSUKI-KUN!!
AH!
OH, CHIKI-CHAN!
SO THIS IS WHERE YOU WERE! I'VE BEEN LOOKING ALL OVER FOR YOU!!
I NEED CHIKI-CHAN FOR SOME-THING.
COULD WE TALK ALONE?

IT'S FINE?
YOU DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH IT?
Really?
OF COURSE. IF YOU NEED HER FOR SOMETHING, GO AHEAD.
?
HUH?
THAT'S FINE.

SORRY I PUSHED YA.
I...
NEED HER?! I D-D-DO NEED HER FOR SOME-THING!!
NOT REALLY ...
LET'S GO, CHIKI-CHAN!

NATSUKI-KUN...
IS ACTUALLY A PRETTY NICE GUY, ISN'T HE?
Now I feel like a jerk.
TATSUAKI-KUN?
WHAT DID YOU NEED?
WAH!
RIGHT!
YEAH, YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT!
OH GOD...
WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?
ABOUT WHAT?

R-RIGHT. SOOO...
T-TODAY...
I'LL WALK YOU HOME AGAIN.

STUPID NATSUKI.

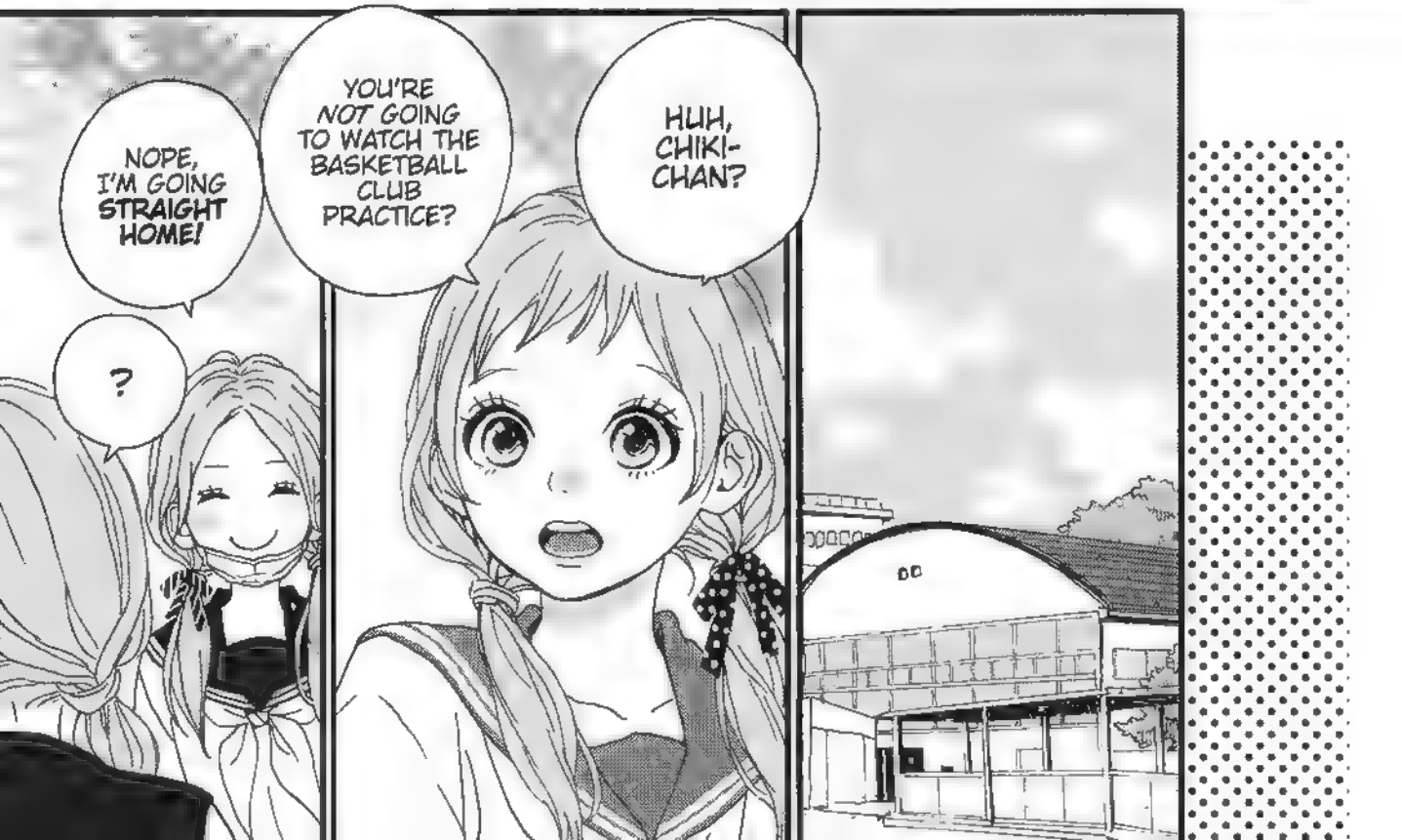
IF YOU'RE NOT OKAY WITH IT, YOU NEED TO COME RIGHT OUT AND SAY SO.
YOU SAW THAT?
OH, YUI.
WHY DID YOU HAND CHIKI OVER TO TATSUAKI?

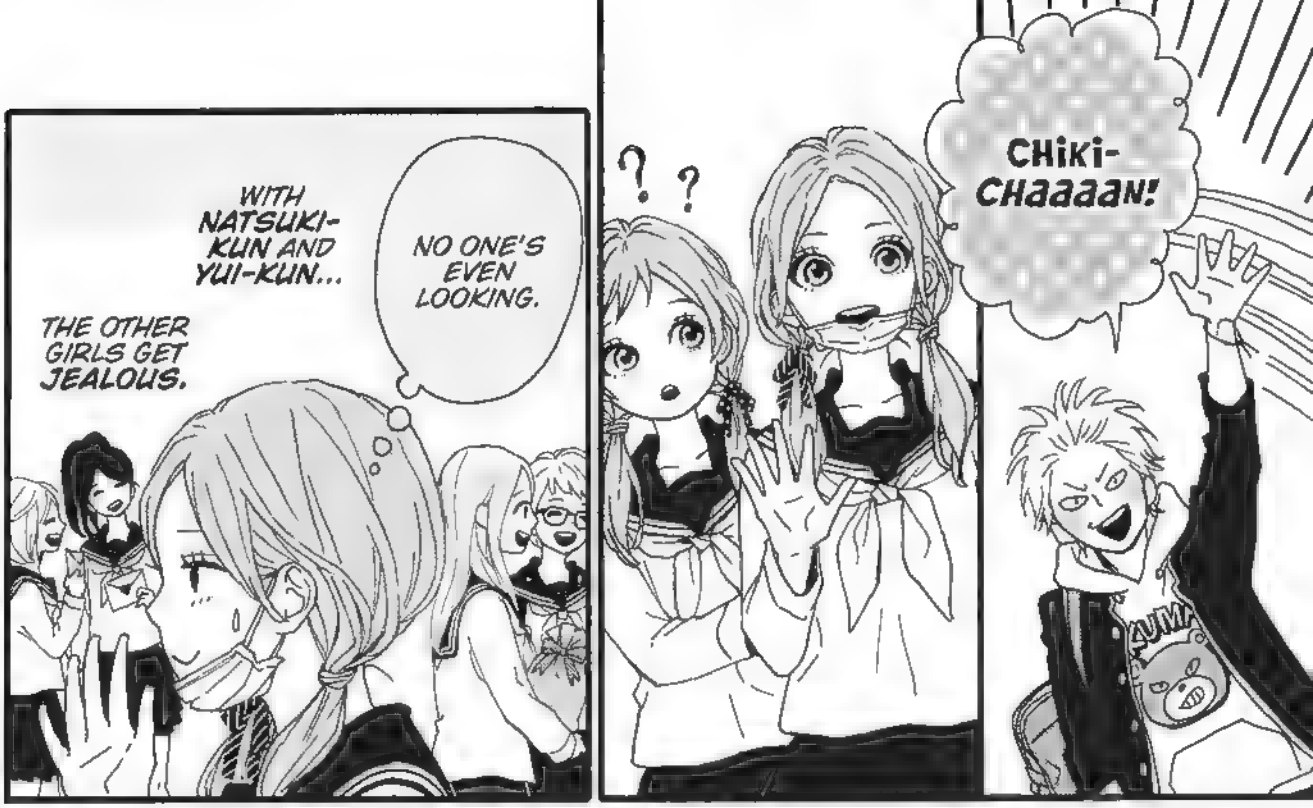
FINE, BE THAT WAY.
IT'S OKAY, IT'S NO BIG DEAL.
THAT'S WHY PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS TAKING WHAT'S YOURS.
IF HE NEEDED TO TALK TO HER, IT'S NOT REALLY ANY OF MY BUSINESS.
BUT...

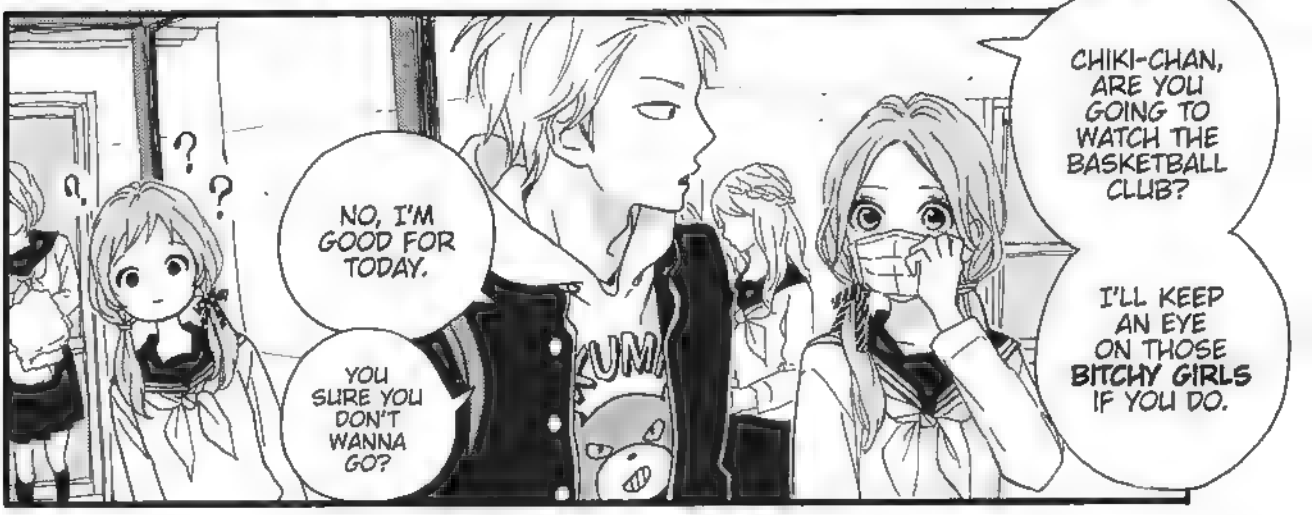
MAMI, LET'S GO.
OKAY...
BIIING
BOOONG
BUT THIS TIME...
YOU CAN'T JUST ACCEPT HALF.
BEEENG
BOOONG...
YUI-KUN...
I WANNA TAKE THIS DRINK TO CHIKI-CHAN.
It's nice and warm.
COFFEE'S NOT GOOD FOR A COLD.
You're so cute
NATSUKI-KUN!
ARE YOU GONNA EAT THAT FRIED BREAD?
Class 3-4

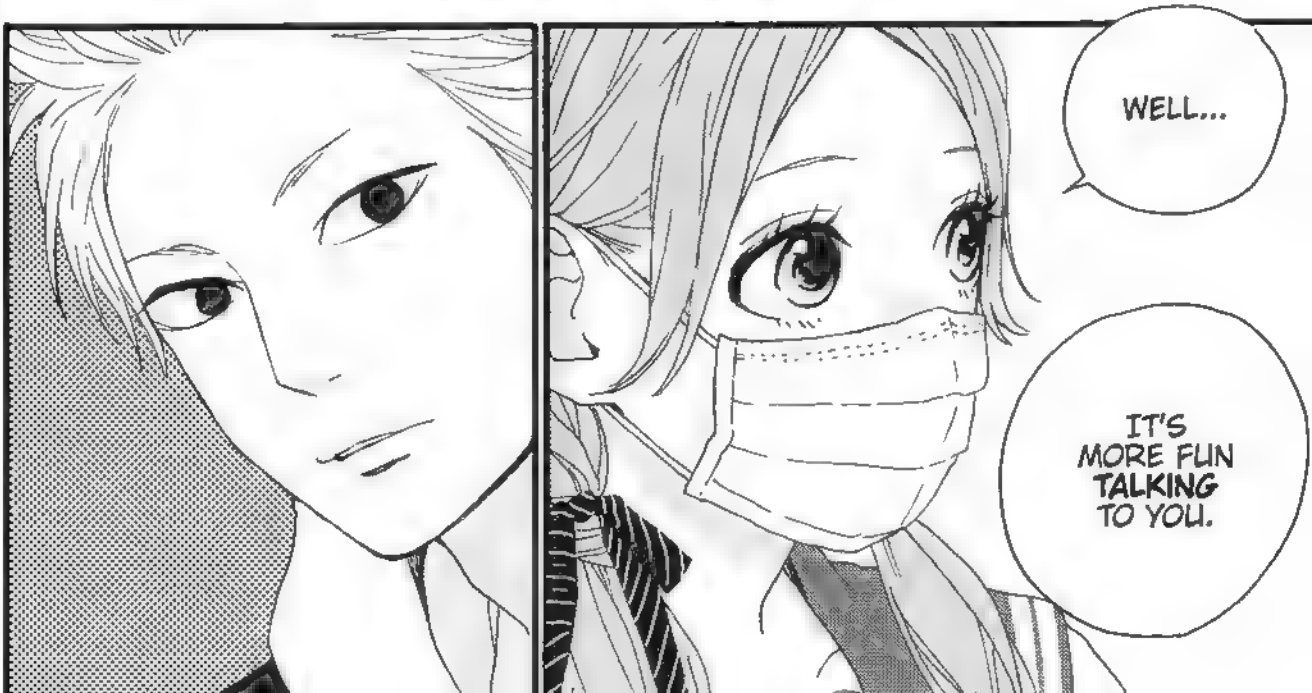
SCORE!! THANKS!!
OKAY, SURE.
HOLD IT.
UH... WELL...
Y'SEE, I LOOOOOVE FRIED BREAD!
IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA EAT IT, WHY NOT GIVE IT TO ME?!
OH, SORRY. I DIDN'T KNOW...
IT WASN'T THAT HE WASN'T GONNA EAT IT. GIVE IT BACK.
FRIED BREAD IS NATSUKI'S FAVORITE. THAT'S WHY HE WAS SAVING IT.
NOM
BOO-YAH!
MILK
IT'S FINE.
YOU CAN HAVE IT. REALLY!

YOU CAN HAVE MINE...
BUT ONLY HALF.
TOSS
IF YOU WANT MORE...
YOU'LL HAVE TO PUT UP MORE OF A FIGHT NEXT TIME.


HUH, CHIKI-CHAN?
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WATCH THE BASKETBALL CLUB PRACTICE?
NOPE, I'M GOING STRAIGHT HOME!
?


NO ONE'S EVEN LOOKING.
WITH NATSUKI-KUN AND YUI-KUN...
THE OTHER GIRLS GET JEALOUS.
? ?
CHiKi-CHaaaaN!


? ? ?
NO, I'M GOOD FOR TODAY.
YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANNA GO?
CHIKI-CHAN, ARE YOU GOING TO WATCH THE BASKETBALL CLUB?
I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON THOSE BITCHY GIRLS IF YOU DO.

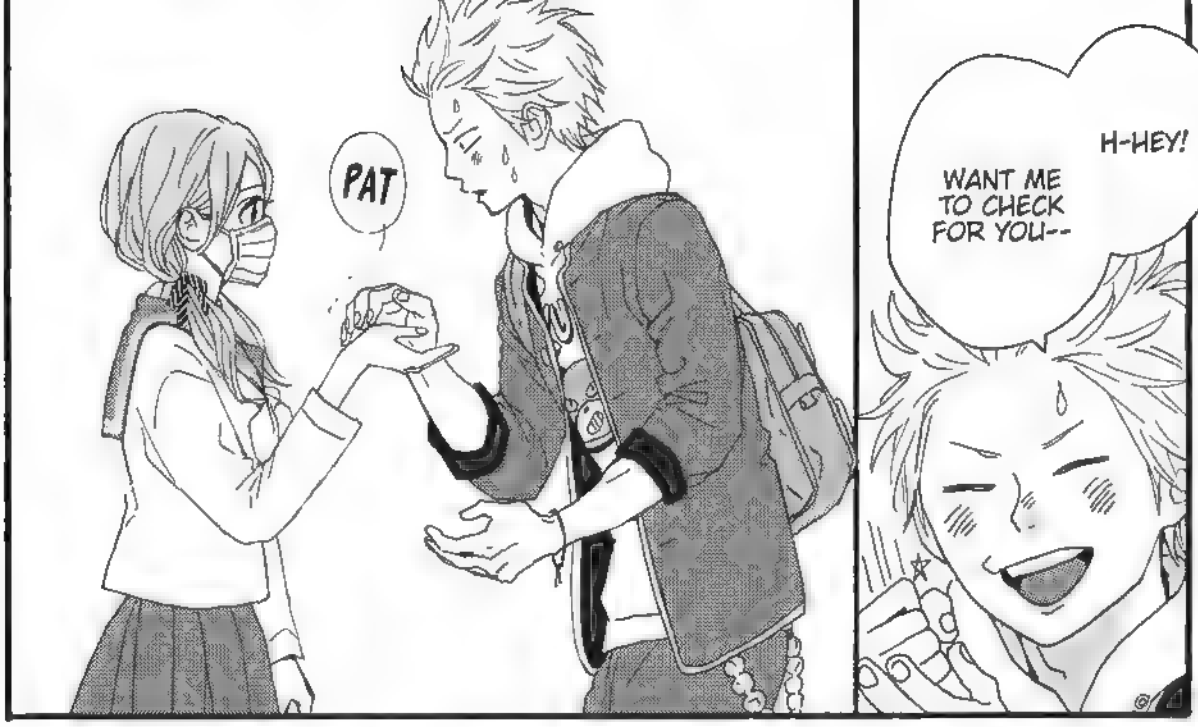

WELL...
IT'S MORE FUN TALKING TO YOU.

Wha ...?
?!
?!
?!
Ah...!
R-Right ...!
KUMF
WHY?

SO?! YOU'RE OBVI-OUSLY SICK!
IT'S JUST A SORE THROAT.
I'M FINE.
WANNA GO TO THE NURSE'S OFFICE?!

"WHY?"
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
YOU OKAY ?!

YOU CAN TELL IF SOMEONE HAS A FEVER BY THEIR PULSE?
DID YOU KNOW...


PAT
H-HEY!
WANT ME TO CHECK FOR YOU--

HUH, WHA?!
HOW DO I DO THIS?!
DAMMIT!
NOT THERE.
HUH?! YOU HAVE NO PULSE!
You're dead!!

'SCUSE ME.

I KNOW I CAN FIND IT ON MY OWN HAND...
THERE!

AH!
THERE IT IS!
YOU DO HAVE A PULSE! LET ME CHECK IT...
.....
HM.
Uh...
STANDING ...
TOGETHER LIKE THIS...

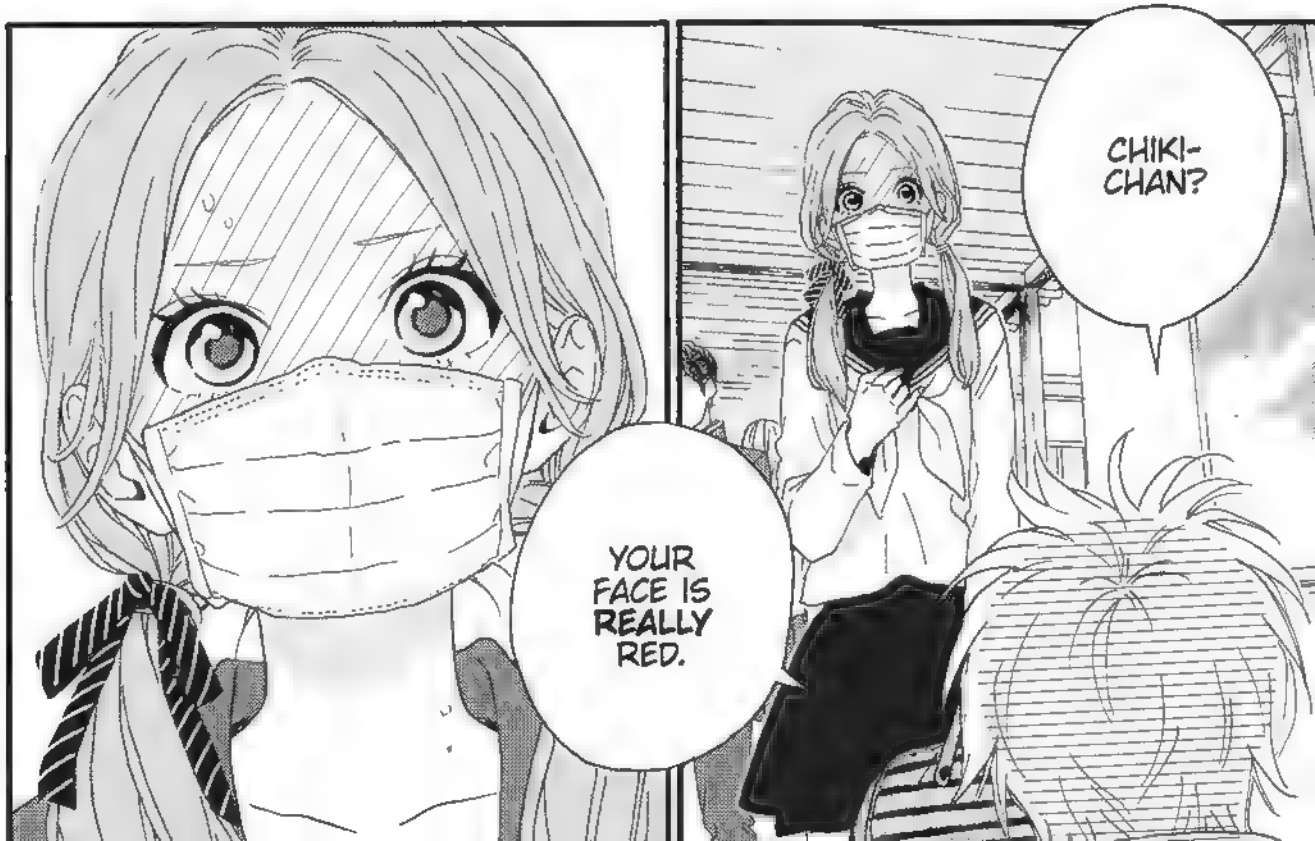
SO CLOSE ...
IF YOU WANT ALL OF IT...
YOU'LL NEED TO PUT UP MORE OF A FIGHT.
BUT...
I DON'T WANT TO GET INTO AN ARGUMENT.
SO I'D RATHER JUST GIVE IT TO HIM.

I CAN'T STAND LOOKING AT YOU...
WHEN YOU'RE SAD LIKE THAT.
IT BOTHERS ME.
THEN DON'T MAKE THAT FACE.

TP

NO ONE CAN STAND LIKE THAT FOR A WHOLE MINUTE!!!
IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE, IMPOS-SIBLE!!
BA-BUMP BA-BUMP BA-BUMP BA-BUMP
IT'S NO GOOD!!!
UWAAAH!
FLAIL

.....


YOUR FACE IS REALLY RED.
CHIKI-CHAN?

SWAY...
I'M FEELING DIZZY.
UH OH...
YOU SURE YOU DON'T HAVE A FEVER?
CHIKI-CHAN?
GRAB

I'LL...
TAKE CHIKI-CHAN TO THE NURSE'S OFFICE.
To be continued...

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1

the first

volume

orange

CHAPTER 17

I BROUGHT THE PHOTOS...
...FROM THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU WANT ANY OF THEM.
I'LL PRINT OUT MORE COPIES AND BRING 'EM TOMORROW.
THANK YOUR DAD FOR US, SUWA!
I WANT THIS ONE AND THIS ONE...
I WANT THIS ONE.

AH... I WANT THAT ONE.
HOW ABOUT YOU, NAHO?
WHICH ONE DO YOU WANT?
AH... UM...
TH-THIS ONE...

...I'M TAKING THIS ONE.
IN THAT CASE...
CHOOSE A DIFFERENT ONE.
NAHO, YOU CAN ONLY SEE MY HEAD THERE.
I WANT THIS ONE!
HEY, COME TO THINK OF IT...
. DID YOU EVER GET YOUR REWARD FROM NAHO FOR THE RELAY, KAKERU?
THEN GIVE THAT ONE BACK.
NO!!
B-BUT
A KISS, REMEMBER?
A KISS.
R...
REWARD?!

IT WAS A KISS ON THE CHEEK.
SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO.
THAT'S OKAY.
Ah
I FORGOT ABOUT THAT. Sorry
I HAVEN'T GOTTEN MY REWARD YET.
...AND I'M THE ONE WHO GOT IT.
YOU TRIED SO HARD SO YOU COULD GO OUT WITH AZU...
IT'S A SHAME YOU COULDN'T PASS TWO PEOPLE UP.
WELL, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FORGOTTEN! I PASSED ONE PERSON UP!
I DIDN'T TRY HARD AT ALL!

OH, THAT'S RIGHT. THANK YOU, EVERYONE...
...FOR THE MESSAGE DURING THE RELAY.
I DON'T NEED IT!
SO INSTEAD, I'LL GIVE YOU A PHOTO OF AZU IN HER CHEERLEADER OUTFIT
MY OWN PHOTO'S CUTER!
BUT WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY...
..."TEN YEARS FROM NOW"?
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT PART...
...EVENTUALLY.

A PHOTO?
WHEN DID YOU SEE THAT?
YOUR GRANDMA SHOWED IT TO ME.
HE'S GOT THE SAME EXPRESSION IN A PHOTO FROM WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE KID.
THIS SHOT OF KAKERU...

I THINK IT'S ENOUGH JUST TO SHOW HER THAT YOU CAN SMILE LIKE THIS, FROM THE BOTTOM OF YOUR HEART.
THERE'S NO USE FEELING REGRETS OR APOLOGIZING.
SO, ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR MOM NOW...
YEAH. WE HAD ONE WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
AND A DOG, I THINK?
YOUR MOM WAS IN THE PHOTO, TOO.

SO THERE'S NO REASON...
...FOR YOU TO SUFFER ANYMORE.
...SAVE KAKERU.
WE CAN...

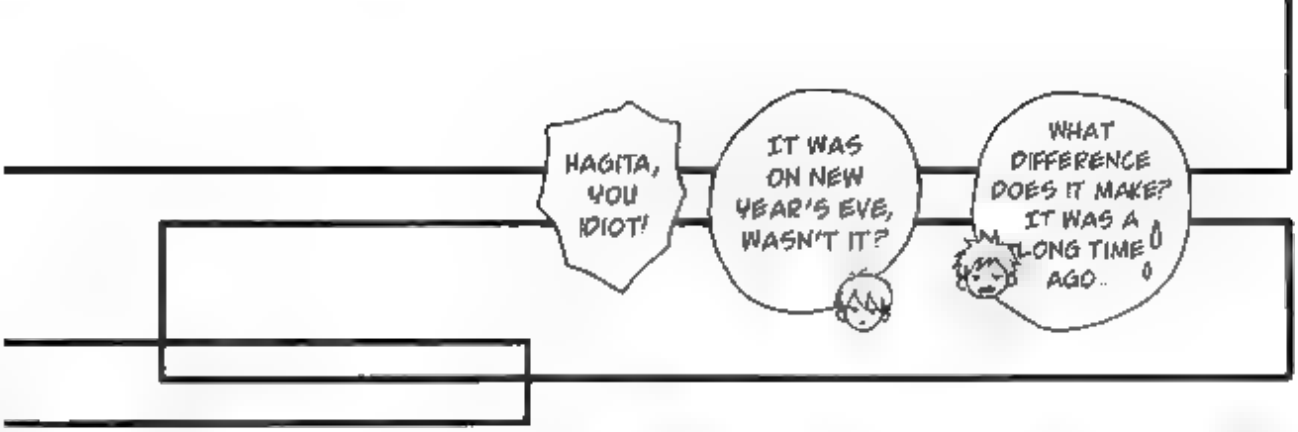
THAT'S THE FEELING I GET.
EVERY-THING WE'VE DONE UP TO NOW...
...IS LEADING TO A BRIGHT FUTURE.
THAT'S THE FEELING I GET.
KAKERU'S GRANDMA GAVE IT TO ME.
SHE SAID IT'S IN EXCHANGE FOR THE PHOTO I GAVE HER THAT WAS IN THE TIME CAPSULE.
HUH...
WHAT IS THAT?
WHAT?

I WANT TO APOLOGIZE TO KAKERU.
I WANT TO SAY I'M SORRY FOR STEALING HIS FUTURE.
FOR STEALING NAHO.
HUH?
YOU STOLE NAHO?
YOU WERE LIKE THAT BACK THEN?
OH, SHUT UP.
DID KAKERU KNOW...
...HOW NAHO FELT ABOUT HIM?

I HOPE...
...HE DID KNOW, THOUGH.
I DON'T KNOW.
YEAH.
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW NAHO FELT, EITHER...
...UNTIL AFTER KAKERU DIED
I ONLY FOUND OUT HOW KAKERU FELT AFTER WORMING IT OUT OF HAGITA.
HUH? I TOLD YOU?
YOU WERE THE SOURCE OF ALL LEAKED SECRETS.
IF I'D ONLY REALIZED IT SOONER...
YEAH.
...I COULD'VE HELPED KAKERU.

SO...
...THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN LOVE WITH NAHO.
I was?
BUT SINCE I DIDN'T KNOW, I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT WHO TO CHEER ON.
IF I'D KNOWN KAKERU WAS GONNA DIE...
...I WOULD'VE BEEN IN HIS CORNER, NO QUESTION.
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW...
...HOW BOTH NAHO AND KAKERU FELT.
I'M THE WORST.
WHAT THE HELL? NONE OF YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ON MY SIDE?
...
SILENCE
SERI-OUSLY?

I ONLY PRETENDED THAT I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW THEY FELT.
BUT IF KAKERU HAD LIVED...
...HE AND NAHO WOULD'VE GOTTEN MARRIED IN THE FUTURE.
THAT'S NOT TRUE, SUWA!
SURE IT IS.
IT ISN'T TRUE, PAPA.
SHE'S RIGHT
EVEN IF KAKERU HAD LIVED, I WOULD'VE MARRIED YOU, SUWA.
WHEN YOU CONFESSED YOUR FEELINGS TO ME WHEN WE WERE STILL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS...
...I WAS OVERJOYED.
WHEN DID YOU DO THAT?!
IN HIGH SCHOOL?! WHEN?!
WHAT?!


HAGITA, YOU IDIOT!
IT WAS ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, WASN'T IT?
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO...

WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO FOR CHRISTMAS EVE?
KAKERU AND NAHO, ARE YOU TWO GONNA SEE EACH OTHER?
HUH?!

YOU WANNA DO SOME-THING, YOU AND ME?
YEAH...
SAT
THEN IT'S SETTLED!
AH...
YEAH!
ARE YOU FREE?

WHAT'S A "TWO-YEAR SHRINE VISIT"?
HOW ABOUT THE TWO-YEAR SHRINE VISIT? YOU WANNA ALL GO TOGETHER AGAIN THIS YEAR?
IT'S LIKE WE'RE DATING.
JUST THE TWO OF US ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
IT IS?!
IT'S A REGIONAL DIALECT TERM.
WHAT?! YOU DON'T KNOW?
THEN LET'S ALL GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER.
THE TWO OF YOU OUGHTA GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER ON NEW YEAR'S.
IT'S WHEN YOU VISIT A SHRINE BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE AND STAY UNTIL IT BECOMES NEW YEAR'S DAY.
MMM... BUT...
...I WANNA GREET THE NEW YEAR WITH ALL YOU GUYS.
HUH.

COME TO THINK OF IT...
...THERE'S SOMETHING I GOTTA DO ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.
FUKASHI SHRINE?
YOHA-SHIRA SHRINE?
WHICH ONE?

WHA...?
I CAN'T GO.
NO, I'M SERIOUS.
WHAT? ARE YOU SERIOUS?!
That sounds like a lie.

I'M TALL ENOUGH AS IT IS!
SHOULD WE PRAY FOR YOU, TOO? "PLEASE MAKE ME TALLER AGAIN THIS YEAR!"

...ALL GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS?
WELL, SHOULD WE...
WELL, I'M GOING HOME.
I gotta go to cram school, anyway.

YOU GUYS GO FOR ME.
SORRY.

I'M BUYING!
LET'S GO!
BYE BYE!
HUH? JUST THE TWO OF US...?
NAHO!
HOW ABOUT GETTING A BEAN JAM PANCAKE?
?!
SURE...
Even though we just barely had sweets!

OW!
BUBACK
WHAT THE HELL?!

MY LETTER SAYS...
...THAT YOU GO WITH US TO THE SHRINE ON NEW YEAR'S.
WHAT?
You're scary.
IT'S NOT A LIE...
YOU'RE LYING...
...ABOUT HAVING SOMETHING TO DO ON NEW YEAR'S.

...TELL NAHO HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HER ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO...
WELL... SOMETIMES THE FUTURE CHANGES.
YOU'RE TRYING TO CHANGE IT, SUWA.
HUH?

THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS IN YOUR LETTER, TAKA-CHAN?
YEAH.
AS I RECALL...
...IT SAID NAHO AND KAKERU HAVE A FIGHT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE OVER SOMETHING.
WHAT?!
NO WAY...
...A CRYING NAHO.
...AND SUWA COMFORTS...
KAKERU GOES HOME...

I'VE ALWAYS LO...
...IT'S OKAY.
HE DOESN'T HATE YOU... AND EVEN IF HE DID...
I THINK...
...KAKERU HATES ME...
I'M NOT GONNA DO THAT.
EVER.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO ERASE THAT?
BUT IT HAS TO DO WITH YOUR FUTURE WITH NAHO.
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HELPING KAKERU.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR ME TO TELL HER THAT, RIGHT?

MARRIED?
SUWA AND NAHO...?
THE FUTURE WHERE YOU AND NAHO GET MARRIED?

THAT'S...
...GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS WORLD!
...SEVERAL YEARS FROM NOW, SHE'LL BE IN LOVE WITH...
EVEN IF NAHO IS IN LOVE WITH KAKERU NOW...
THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS IN MY LETTER.
APPARENTLY, THAT CONFESSION OF HIS FEELINGS WAS THE TRIGGER.

REMEMBER WHAT NAKANO-SENSEI ..
...TOLD US ABOUT PARALLEL WORLDS.
THE WORLD WHERE OUR TEN-YEARS-OLDER SELVES SENT US LETTERS...
...AND THE WORLD WHERE WE RECEIVED THEM EXIST SEPARATELY.
EVEN IF I CHANGE THE FUTURE, NOTHING WILL CHANGE IN THE WORLD WHERE THEY SENT THE LETTERS.

WHEN NAHO AND I GOT MARRIED...
...WE CHOSE THAT PATH BECAUSE KAKERU WAS DEAD.

BUT IN THIS WORLD, I'M NOT GONNA CHOOSE THAT PATH.
THERE'S NO WAY I'M GONNA TELL NAHO HOW I REALLY FEEL ABOUT HER.
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.

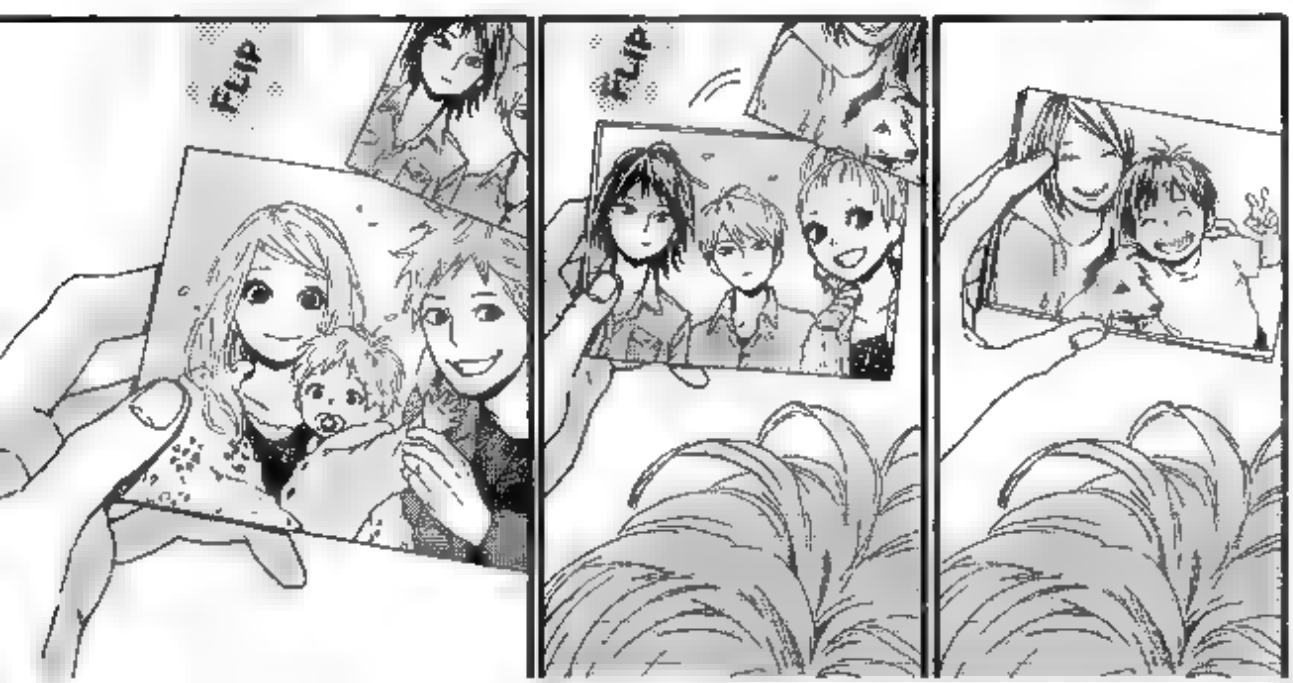
THE DAY KAKERU DIES...

THEY GAVE US A CHANCE TO CHANGE THE FUTURE.
THEY TOLD US THE DAY.

...IS OUR PRESENT.

THE HAPPINESS OUR FUTURE SELVES WRITE ABOUT...

THEY TAUGHT US THAT EVEN OUR DAILY LIVES, WHICH WE TAKE FOR GRANTED, ARE PRECIOUS.



DECEMBER 31ST

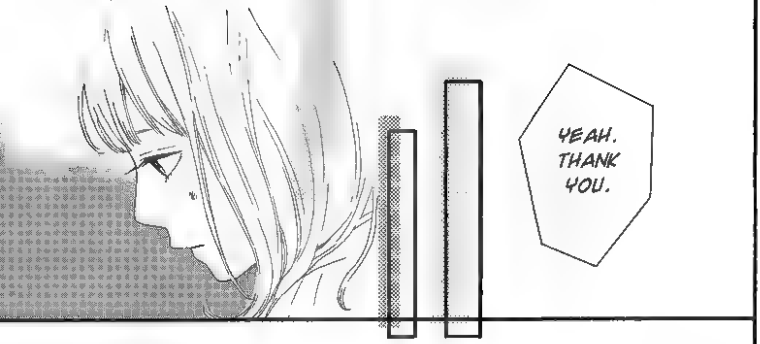
WE ALL GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER AS PLANNED.
KAKERU AND I HAVE A FIGHT
FROM THIS DAY ON, THERE'S SOME KIND OF DISTANCE
BETWEEN KAKERU AND ME.
WE DON'T TALK AS MUCH ANYMORE.

I NEVER GOT TO APOLOGIZE TO KAKERU BEFORE HE DIED.

CHAPTER 18
AUTHOR TAKANO ICHIGO

1224
HELLO, NAHO?
SORRY I COULDN'T MAKE IT AFTER ALL TODAY.
IT'S OKAY...
GRANDMA GOT SICK. I'M AT THE HOSPITAL WITH HER NOW.
I SEE...
IS SHE OKAY?
YEAH.

I'M SORRY.
WHEN TODAY'S CHRIST-MAS EVE...
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
YOU SHOULD BE WITH YOUR GRANDMA RIGHT NOW.



DECEMBER 31ST
THE SIX OF US HAD PLANS TOGETHER FOR CHRISTMAS EVE, BUT KAKERU SUDDENLY COULDN'T COME.

WHEN I ASKED HIM ON THE 24TH WHAT HAPPENED, HE TOLD ME, "GRANDMA GOT SICK. I'M AT THE HOSPITAL WITH HER NOW."

NEXT YEAR...
...SEE HIM NEXT YEAR.
I HOPE I CAN...
...THE FACT OF HIS GRAND-MOTHER GETTING SICK, RIGHT?
IT CAN'T BE HELPED, BECAUSE WE CAN'T CHANGE...

LET'S...
...SEE A LOT MORE OF EACH OTHER NEXT YEAR...
...KAKERU.
NAHO!
TAKA-CHAN!
KAKERU SAID HE'S GOING TO BE LATE.
HOW ABOUT SUWA?
HE'S NOT HERE YET.
HE SAID HE COULDN'T MAKE IT, REMEM-BER?
HI! IS YOUR DATE OVER?
WE JUST RAN INTO EACH OVER THERE!

WE GATHERED AT FUKASHI SHRINE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE. KAKERU WAS LATE, BUT HE CAME.

WE PLAYED ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS. KAKERU AND I LOST, SO THE TWO OF US HAD TO GO BUY DRINKS FOR EVERYONE.

KAKERU SEEMED DIFFERENT THAT NIGHT. HE DIDN'T TALK MUCH.

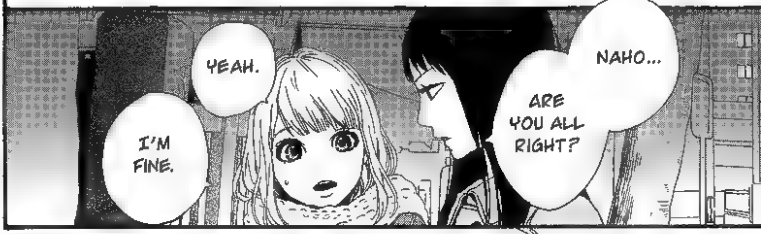
WHEN THE TWO OF US WERE ALONE, WE TALKED ABOUT HIS GRANDMOTHER.

HE MUTTERED, "IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO GRANDMA, I'D BE ALONE."

AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HE MEANT.
I SAID, "YOU WON'T BE ALONE."
I TOLD HIM, "RIGHT NOW, LET'S FORGET ABOUT OUR TROUBLES AND HAVE A GOOD TIME."

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER,
KAKERU LOOKED ANGRY AT ME.

"WHAT DO YOU KNOW, NAHO?" HE ASKED.



YOU'LL BE FINE, LIKE ALWAYS.
AND EVEN IF YOU FIGHT, YOU CAN ALWAYS MAKE UP!
...SO CALL ON US ANYTIME.
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, WE'LL BE HERE...
You just admitted you were!
WAIT, NO! IDIOT! WE'RE NOT CLOSE!
THAT'S RIGHT. LIKE US.
RIGHT, HAGITA?
IT'S LIKE THEY SAY: A SPAT IS EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE CLOSE TO EACH OTHER

I MADE KAKERU ANGRY THAT DAY.

HE TOLD ME, "I DON'T WANT TO TALK ANYMORE" AND "STAY AWAY FROM ME."

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAD DONE WRONG.

WHEN I THINK OF IT NOW, I REALIZE WHAT A TERRIBLE THING I SAID. "FORGET ABOUT OUR TROUBLES." SHEESH.

I WANT YOU TO LEARN MORE ABOUT KAKERU AND WATCH WHAT YOU SAY SO YOU DON'T HURT HIM.

EVEN IF IT DOESN'T GO WELL, BE SURE TO APOLOGIZE THIS TIME.

SORRY I'M LATE.

KAKERU!

YOU'RE WEARING A SCARF, HUH, NAHO?

IT'S CUTE.

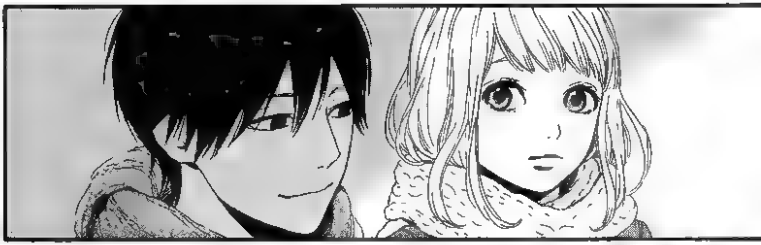
I'M WEARING A SCARF, TOO.

IT'S CUTE.

HE'S WEARING A SCARF.

WHERE'S SUWA?
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE SAID HE LOOKED "HANDSOME" INSTEAD?
Hm?
?
U...
YOU LOOK CUTE TOO, KAKERU!
HA HA HA
THANKS.
He said he had five bowls of rice, seven rice cakes, as well as soba noodles...
HE JUST ATE TOO MUCH.
HE SAID HE HAS A STOMACH-ACHE.
AT HOME IN BED.
HE'S GONNA GET MAD AT YOU LATER.
HAGITA.
YAY!
MINE SAYS "BEST LUCK"!
MINE'S "GOOD LUCK."
I GOT "SLIGHTLY GOOD LUCK"
FORTUNES
100 YEN

REALLY? ALL RIGHT!
THE SAME AS ME!
I GOT "SLIGHTLY GOOD LUCK," TOO
"SLIGHTLY GOOD LUCK."
MINE SAYS...
WHAT FORTUNE DID YOU GET?
we wanna know!
HM?
HOW ABOUT YOU, KAKERU?



IT'S TRUE.
HAGITA, BUY US SOMETHING WARM TO DRINK.
THEY'RE SELLING SWEET SAKE OVER THERE.
I'LL TAKE MILK TEA.
I COULD GO FOR CAFE AU LAIT...
ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS!
HE'S DIFFERENT TONIGHT.
Fukashi Shrine
HAPPY NEW YEAR

HAGITA, DO YOU HAVE A PHONE?
Ah! LET'S TRY CALLING SUWA.
CALL HIM ON YOUR OWN!
IT'LL BE OKAY.
THEY'VE BEEN CHANGING LITTLE BY LITTLE.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
NAHO...
...AND KAKERU.
THE WAY NAHO IS NOW, THEY WILL.
I HOPE THEY'LL BE OKAY.
RMY

WANT TO CHECK OUT ANOTHER VENDING MACHINE?
#A #A #A
MAYBE HE'D BE SATISFIED WITH SWEET RED-BEAN SOUP.

AFTER ALL...
...I KNOW MORE ABOUT KAKERU THIS TIME AROUND.
IT'LL BE FINE AS LONG AS I DON'T SAY WHAT WAS IN THE LETTER.
HUH? THEY DON'T HAVE...
...THE MILKSHAKE HAGITA WANTED.
who drinks a milkshake when it's this cold?

NAHO, SORRY ABOUT LAST TIME.

I'D BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
EVERY DAY...

SUDDENLY BAILING ON YOU ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
OH. THAT'S OKAY.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

NEXT YEAR...
NEXT YEAR, LET'S BE TOGETHER!
HA HA!
AS LONG AS MY GRANDMA DOESN'T GET SICK AGAIN.
LET'S...
...MAKE A PROMISE TO EACH OTHER, KAKERU.
IS YOUR GRAND-MOTHER OKAY NOW?
YEAH.
SHE WAS DOING BETTER TODAY.
AT FIRST, SHE JUST HAD A REGULAR COLD...
...BUT IT TOOK A TURN FOR THE WORSE ON CHRISTMAS EVE AND ALMOST TURNED INTO PNEUMONIA.

I WONDER IF KAKERU WAS WORRIED.
OH... SO THAT'S IT...
IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO GRANDMA...
...I'D BE ALONE.
BA-DUMP
D...
DON'T WORRY...
AFTER ALL, THE LETTER SAYS...
...WE MEET HIS GRAND-MOTHER LONG AFTER HE DIES.
SHE'LL STILL BE AROUND TEN YEARS FROM NOW.
YOUR GRAND-MOTHER WILL BE FINE.
I THOUGHT THINGS WOULD BE FINE...
...WITH MY MOTHER, TOO.

WRONG ANSWER!
SORRY.
AH...
SORRY!
I'M GETTING ALL GLOOMY ON YOU.
PHEW
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
I WAS SCARED...
...FOR A SECOND THERE.

I THOUGHT I SAID THE WRONG THING.
I THOUGHT THINGS WOULD BE FINE WITH MY MOTHER, TOO.
I HAD NO IDEA SHE WAS GOING TO DIE ON ME.
I STILL WISH I'D BEEN WITH HER AT THE TIME.

THAT FAKE SMILE...
...JUST MAKES ME EVEN MORE ANXIOUS.
THIS IS KAKERU'S...
...BAD HABIT.
NAHO.
WOULD YOU MIND IF I WENT HOME EARLY TONIGHT?

I'M SCARED.
CAN YOU STAY A LITTLE LONGER?
IF POSSI-BLE...
...
...AND WANT TO BE WITH HER.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT GRANDMA...
...TO LEAVE KAKERU ALONE.
RIGHT NOW I'M SCARED...
HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE?
I PROMISE YOU, SHE'S NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
YOUR GRAND-MOTHER WILL BE ALL RIGHT.

IF HE'S WITH ALL OF US, I'M SURE KAKERU WON'T WORRY.
...YOU JUST GOT HERE... YOU CAN STAY A LITTLE LONGER...
BUT...
HOW? I CAN'T TELL YOU...
IT WAS THE SAME ON THE DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY.
...
HOW CAN YOU SAY EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT?
YOU HAVE NO IDEA!

AH!
NO...
"ALL RIGHT."
AS IF PEOPLE CAN DECIDE WHETHER SOMETHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT!
WAIT.
ONE MORE TIME...
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW MUCH SHE WAS SUFFERING.
SO MUCH THAT DEATH WAS PREFERABLE, WHILE I THOUGHT EVERYTHING WAS "ALL RIGHT."
AND I LEFT MY MOTHER ALONE!
I WANT TO DO IT OVER AGAIN!

I...
...KILLED HER!

I HAVE TO...
SOME-THING...
...SAY SOME-THING.
...THAT WILL PUT KAKERU'S MIND AT EASE.
I HAVE TO APOLO-GIZE.
SORRY... I'M GOING HOME.
WAIT.
FWAP
DON'T.

I DON'T WANT TO...
...TALK ANYMORE.
STAY AWAY...
...FROM ME.

I'M SORRY...
...WASN'T I ABLE TO CHANGE IT?
WHY...
IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
HELLO, SUWA?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING RIGHT NOW?
I'M BUSY!
DOING WHAT?
WATCHING THE SONG CONTEST.
I TOLD YOU YOU'D BETTER COME!

DO YOU THINK...
...THAT IF YOU TOLD NAHO HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HER, KAKERU COULDN'T BE SAVED?
...
IF THAT'S THE CASE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY.
I PROMISE YOU WE'LL HELP KAKERU, SO BE HONEST WITH HER ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.

SUWA...
...BUT I DON'T THINK CHANGING THE FUTURE IS NECESSARILY THE RIGHT THING TO DO.
IT'S KIND OF LATE IN THE DAY TO SAY THIS NOW...
SUWAAAA
HEY!
JACK-ASS!
WHAT AM I, A LANDMARK?
SINCE YOU WERE A NO-SHOW, I HAD A HELL OF A TIME FINDING THE MEETUP SPOT.

BY CHANGING THE FUTURE...
...IT HAS AN EFFECT NOT ONLY ON KAKERU, BUT ON OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
TAKE THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL, FOR EXAMPLE.
KAKERU WON FIRST PLACE IN THE RELAY...
...SO THE GUY WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE FIRST CAME IN SECOND PLACE.
THE BLUE TEAM WAS SUPPOSED TO WIN, BUT BECAUSE OF US, THE RED TEAM WON.
SAY YOU CHANGE THE FUTURE...
...AND THAT IN TURN CHANGES SOMEONE ELSE'S FUTURE. I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S RIGHT.
HEY.
YOU LISTENING TO ME?
ignoring me?
LET ME TALK TO HIM.

BECAUSE I KNOW YOU COULD PROTECT NAHO!
...
SUWA!
I TOLD YOU I WAS ROOTING FOR NAHO AND KAKERU...
...BUT IT'S NOT JUST THEM. I WANT TO CHEER YOU ON, TOO.
WHAT THE HECK, YOU GUYS?
I THOUGHT I DIDN'T HAVE ANYONE ON MY SIDE.
HUH?
THE NEW YEAR WILL BE UPON US..
THE NEW YEAR WILL BE UPON US IN TEN MIN-UTES.
SUWA?
WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW?
I'M HANGING UP.
WHAT?
RM

I STILL DON'T REALLY KNOW KAKERU.
BEEP
SUWA...
...OR WHICH WORDS WILL MAKE HIM HAPPY.
I DON'T KNOW WHICH WORDS WILL HURT HIM...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S IN HIS HEART.
NO MATTER WHICH WORDS I CHOSE...
...I HURT KAKERU WITHOUT REALIZING IT.
NAHO...

ARE YOU OKAY?
I'M SORRY... SUWA...
I COULDN'T MANAGE TO...
YEAH. IT'S ALL RIGHT.
I'M SORRY...

KAKERU...
...MAY HATE ME NOW.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
...IT'LL WORK OUT.
AND EVEN IF HE DOES...
HE DOESN'T HATE YOU.

I'LL WATCH OVER YOU TWO...
...TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DRIFT APART.
IF YOU GUYS HAVE PROBLEMS...
...I'LL GRAB KAKERU BY THE SCRUFF OF THE NECK...
...AND HAUL HIM BEFORE YOU LIKE I DID BEFORE.
TRY TO MAKE EVEN MORE PROGRESS WITH HIM.
SO NAHO...
...DON'T BE SCARED.

TREASURE THE TIME...
...YOU SPEND WITH KAKERU.
YEAH...
THANK YOU.
NOW GET HIM BACK HERE.
IF YOU DON'T HURRY, IT'LL BE NEW YEARS!
RIGHT!
17 STEP

TAKAKO IS...
...GONNA BE PISSED AT ME.
"I DON'T WANT TO TALK ANYMORE."
HUFF
HUFF
"STAY AWAY FROM ME."
IF...

FROM THIS DAY ON, THERE'S DISTANCE BETWEEN KAKERU AND ME.
WE DON'T TALK AS MUCH ANYMORE, EITHER.

I NEVER GOT TO APOLOGIZE TO KAKERU BEFORE HE DIED.

...IS IT MY FAULT...
CRACK
...THAT KAKERU DIED?

PRRRR
PRRRR

KAKERU...
PICK UP...
5...
4...
3...
2...
1...

IF...
...PARTS OF THE FUTURE CAN BE CHANGED...
...AND PARTS OF THE FUTURE CANNOT...
...WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE KAKERU?

CHAPTER 19

MOM ALWAYS MADE DECISIONS WITHOUT EVEN ASKING ME FOR MY INPUT.

AT THE END OF MY FIRST YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL, MOM SAID WE WERE MOVING TO MATSUMOTO.

IT WAS SUDDEN

AFTER ALL, YOU PROMISED NOT TO JOIN A CLUB AT YOUR NEW SCHOOL, RIGHT?
SO YOU DON'T NEED THOSE THINGS.
THEY WERE ALL BEATEN-UP ANYWAY.
GIMME A DAMN BREAK!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO TOSS 'EM!
THERE WAS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO ME!!
バタン
SLAM
SHE NEVER CHANGES.

KAKERU-KUN!
LET'S WALK HOME TOGETHER!
...MOM GOT DIVORCED WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING TO ME.
EVEN WHEN I WAS LITTLE
COOL.
Though she can get a scary look in her eyes
CHINO-SAN.
CHEERFUL.
Talks a lot.
AZU?
HE'S A REALLY NICE GUY
Even if he is tall and loud...
SUWA-KUN.
...
TAKA-MIYA-SAN.
...
Glasses.
HAGITA-KUN.

BZZ
BZZ
Mom
Where are you? I have to go to the hospital. Don't screw around, just come home right now.
I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HER.
TRADE ME FOR YOUR CURRY BUN!
I'LL APOLOGIZE TO HER LATER.
I'M GONNA FORGET ABOUT MOM FOR THE MOMENT AND JUST HAVE FUN.
SURE.
KAKERU-KUN, LET'S GO!
LET'S DITCH HAGITA.
HEY!
WHAT A PAIN.
SHE CAN GO BY HER-SELF, CAN'T SHE?
I can't go with you right now. You're not a child and can get there on your own, right? Don't ruin my life.

THAT WAS THE LAST CONVERSATION I HAD WITH MOM.
SHE DIDN'T TEXT ME BACK.
MORNING!
MORN-ING!
DID YOU BRING YOUR SWEAT-SHIRT?
MORN-ING!
EVERYONE'S ACTING NORMAL.
WELL, OF COURSE...
THEY DON'T KNOW.

KAKERU!
GOOD MORNING!
...THE WORLD WOULDN'T CHANGE.
...AND EVEN IF THEY DID...
NOBODY KNOWS MY MOM IS DEAD...
LUCKY HIM.
SUWA IS IN THE SOCCER CLUB?
HUH.
I DON'T WANT TO, ESPE-CIALLY.
NAH.
...
...AT THE BALL GAME TOURNA-MENT.
I WANTED TO PLAY SOCCER, TOO...

SORRY!
CLASS 3 WON THE GIRLS' SOFTBALL FINAL!
GAME SET!
I'M DONE WITH ALL THAT.
I REALLY AM SORRY.
THANK YOU, AZU!
YOU DID YOUR BEST!
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, AZU!
I MESSED UP!
IT'S MY FAULT... I'M SORRY...

FORGET ABOUT IT.
THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS PLACE.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, NARUSE?
THIS IS YOUR FAULT!
WE DON'T NEED YOU ON THE TEAM!

I SHOULD'VE DONE IT, EVEN IF WE LOST.
...BECAUSE I BOWED OUT.
AZU ONLY TOOK ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BATTING...
SHE'S DEPRESSED AFTER WHAT HAPPENED.
...I'M WORRIED ABOUT AZU.
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU SEEM DOWN.
MY WORK IS DONE HERE.
I'M THE ONE WHO STOPPED YOU.
YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG, TAKAMIYA-SAN.
IT'S MY FAULT YOU DIDN'T BAT.
IF IT BOTHERS YOU, THEN IT BOTHERS ME.
OKAY?

...REMINDS ME OF ME.
SHE KIND OF...
TAKE CARE.
I'M SORRY.
...OKAY.
I CAN'T JOIN THE SOCCER CLUB, AFTER ALL.
SORRY, SUWA.
MAYBE THAT'S WHY SHE'S ALWAYS ON MY MIND.
BUT IF YOU EVER DO WANT TO JOIN, THE DOOR'S ALWAYS OPEN. I'LL BE WAITING.
OKAY.
THANKS.
OKAY, I'LL TELL THE SENIORS.
I SEE...

I HAD A BLAST PLAYING SOCCER WITH SUWA.
...I DON'T WANNA QUIT.
WHEN YOU LOOK LIKE THAT...
THE SENIORS WERE ALL REALLY NICE, TOO.
BUT...
...I MADE A PROMISE TO MOM.
I REGRET THAT.
...ON THE DAY OF THE OPENING CERE-MONY.
I'M SORRY I BROKE ONE PROM-ISE...

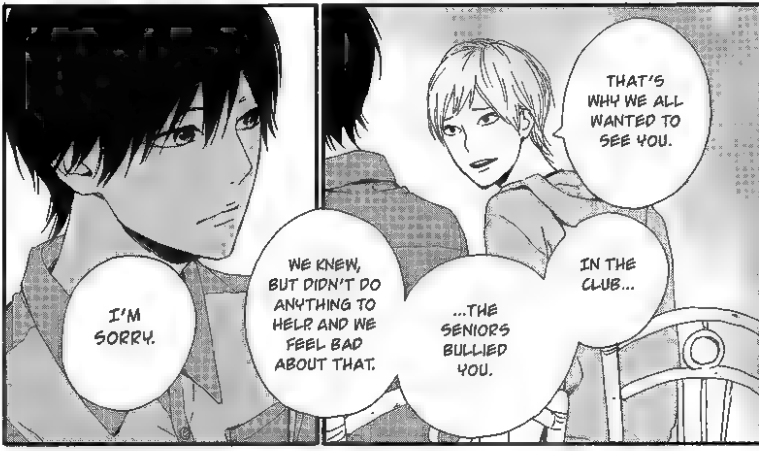
KAKERU!
HERE!
SWISH
THAT'S COLD!
WHAT?!
HA HA HA
IT'S ICE!
From shaved ice!
YOU WERE JUST STANDING THERE THE LONGEST TIME, SO WE FIGURED YOU MUST BE GETTING HOT
HEY, YOU GUYS, QUIT SCREWING AROUND AND GET TO WORK.
WAIT!
WHAT KIND OF OUTFIT IS THAT, HAGITA-KUN?
HUH?
I FELL IN THE POOL AND GOT MY CLOTHES WET.
SO I BORROWED HERS.
YOU BORROWED THOSE CLOTHES?

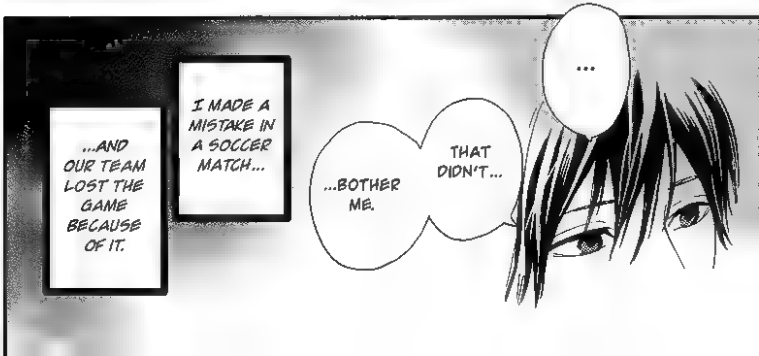
I HAVE FUN...
...WHEN I'M WITH EVERY-ONE.
THERE ARE ALWAYS A LOT OF LAUGHS...
...WHEN WE'RE TOGETH-ER.
I DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW...
...ABOUT MY TROUBLES, MY PAIN.
IF I TOLD THEM ABOUT IT, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO BE WITH THEM ANYMORE.

"MATSUMOTO BON-BON"?
...SO I'LL KEEP ALL THAT BOTTLED UP INSIDE FOREVER.
I DON'T WANT THEM TO HATE ME...
BZZZZ
BZZZZ
THAT'D BE RUDE TO SUWA.
NO, NO, NO!
...
I JUST WANNA GO WITH HER...
A FESTIVAL?
I WONDER IF NAHO WILL WEAR A YUKATA.
HELLO...?
NARUSE! LONG TIME NO TALK!

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D HEAR THAT VOICE AGAIN.
A CLASS-MATE FROM MY HIGH SCHOOL IN TOKYO.
HEY, HOW ABOUT COMING OVER FOR SUMMER VACATION?
IT'D BE COOL TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
NAH...
I DON'T THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE IT OVER THE SUMMER.
I DON'T ESPE-CIALLY WANT TO SEE HIM.
THEN HOW ABOUT NEXT MONTH?
THE OTHER GUYS IN THE CLUB WANNA SEE YOU AGAIN, TOO.
EVEN THOUGH WE'RE APART, WE'RE STILL FRIENDS!
'KAY?
...
I COULD DO NEXT MONTH.
OH, WELL...
I GUESS THEY WERE MY FRIENDS.
NARUSE!

THERE'S SOMETHING WE WANNA APOLOGIZE TO YOU ABOUT.
SO LISTEN, NARUSE...
I KIND OF FEEL LIKE I ALREADY WANT TO GO BACK HOME.
AH...
WHAT IS IT?


I'M SORRY.
WE KNEW, BUT DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO HELP AND WE FEEL BAD ABOUT THAT.
...THE SENIORS BULLIED YOU.
IN THE CLUB...
THAT'S WHY WE ALL WANTED TO SEE YOU.


...AND OUR TEAM LOST THE GAME BECAUSE OF IT.
I MADE A MISTAKE IN A SOCCER MATCH...
...BOTHER ME.
THAT DIDN'T...
...

EVEN THOUGH I WAS A FRESHMAN, I WAS TREATED LIKE AN ACE.
...BUT THE COACH KEPT PUTTING ME IN.
THE SENIORS TOLD ME NOT TO PLAY IN ANY MORE MATCHES...
WE LOST BY THAT ONE GOAL.
I GOT CALLED ON A FOUL IN FRONT OF OUR GOAL, AND IT BECAME A PENALTY KICK.
AND I KNEW YOU GUYS WEREN'T THAT FOND OF ME, EITHER.
THAT'S WHEN THEY STARTED BULLYING ME.
THE SENIORS DIDN'T SEEM TO LIKE THAT.
HUH? WHY NOT?!
...NO, I DON'T.
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN OVER THERE, TOO?
HEY!
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE NOT PLAYING... BECAUSE OF US...
NOTHING LIKE THAT.
THAT'S WHY...
...I DON'T REALLY THINK OF YOU AS FRIENDS.
Ah!
HOW'S LIFE IN NAGANO?
YOU PLAY SOCCER THERE?

MAYBE I CAN TELL THESE GUYS.
MY MOM...
...COMMITTED SUICIDE.
AND IT'S MY FAULT.
THE REGRET EATS ME UP EVERY DAY.
I CAN'T FORGIVE MYSELF.
THAT'S WHY I'M THROUGH PLAYING SOCCER.
EVERY DAY, I THINK...
...I SHOULD JUST DISAPPEAR.
THAT I'M BETTER OFF DEAD...
MAYBE THEY'LL LAUGH...
...AT ME.

YOU'RE NOT THAT KIND OF GUY, NARUSE!
HA HA HA
YOU HAD ME FOR A SECOND THERE!
WHAT? IT'S A JOKE?
Don't do that!! Ha ha!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKIN' ABOUT, NARUSE?
HA HA HA
DON'T KILL YOURSELF, YOU HEAR?
THAT'S THE COWARD'S WAY OUT.
BESIDES, IF YOU DIE, IT'LL LEAVE A BAD AFTER-TASTE IN OUR MOUTHS.
I'M GLAD I DIDN'T TELL THEM.
THERE, SEE?
I FIGURED.

IT'S...
...NO JOKE.
...
CAN YOU HEAR ME?
CAN YOU TELL ME...
...YOUR NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH?
..NARUSE..
...KAKERU...

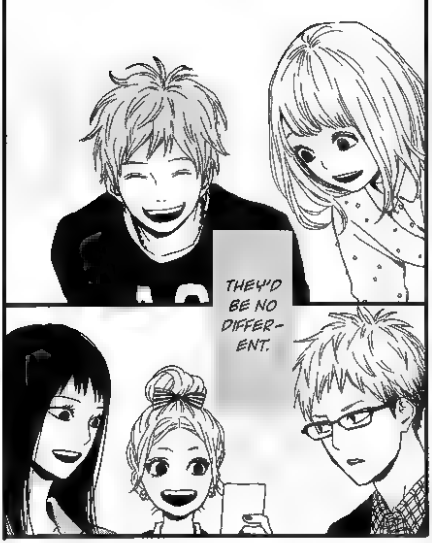
A HOS-
PITAL?
WHAT IS THIS?
OH...
SWELL...
I LIVED.
KAKERU...
THANK GOOD-
NESS.
I RAN SOME TESTS, BUT YOU CHECKED OUT OKAY.
WE'LL HAVE YOU STAY HERE FOR ANOTHER WEEK, THOUGH...
...AND AFTER THAT, YOU'LL BE EXAMINED AT A PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY.

DON'T EVER DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT AGAIN.
I'M NOT GOING TO ANY HOSPITAL.
WHY NOT?
THE DOCTOR SAID ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TALK TO THEM.
I'M NOT GOING.
AFTER ALL...
...I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
I DON'T WANNA GO.
BUT...
I SAID I'M NOT GOING!
CRASH

I'M SORRY I COULDN'T DO ANY-THING TO HELP.
IF YOU'RE THAT ADAMANT ABOUT IT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO.
WELL, THAT'S FINE.
WHAT THE HELL...
...AM I DOING?
CAUSING TROU-BLE...
HURTING GRAND-MA...
I HAVE TO GET MY ACT TO-GETHER.
STAND UP STRAIGHT, LOOK AHEAD...
...AND LIVE.

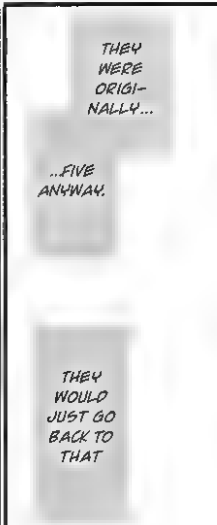
HUFF
HUFF
カラン
CLANG
KAKERU!
MY LEG...
DAMMIT.
I'M SORRY.
...THAT'S MY FAULT.
ANOTHER LOSS...

"DON'T FEEL BAD, KAKERU."
"IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT."
I HAVE TO LIVE...
...BUT I HAVE NO HOPE.
BUT IF I'D DIED, THEN...
...I WOULDN'T HAVE MESSED UP THE RELAY.
I HAVE TO BECOME STRONGER.
THIS ISN'T WORKING.
WHAT WOULD A WORLD WITHOUT ME BE LIKE?
Suwa Hiroto
Are you free tomorrow? Let's bury that time capsule we were talking about last time!


THEY'D BE NO DIFFER-ENT.

MAYBE I ALWAYS SHOULD HAVE STAYED ALONE.
YOU WON'T BE ALONE, KAKERU.

...TO EVER CHANGE.
I DON'T WANT THEM...


THEY WERE ORIGI-NALLY...
..FIVE ANYWAY.
THEY WOULD JUST GO BACK TO THAT

"I'M GONNA FORGET ABOUT MOM FOR THE MOMENT AND JUST HAVE FUN."
...AND HAVE A GOOD TIME.
LET'S FORGET ABOUT OUR TROUBLES FOR TONIGHT...
...NO, I'M NOT.
YOU'RE KIND OF GLUM TONIGHT.
WHY...
DON'T PATRONIZE ME!
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I DID.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW, NAHO?
...WOULD YOU SAY SOME-THING SO CRUEL?

...WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?
IF IT'S NOT MY FAULT...
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT!
DON'T FEEL BAD, KAKERU!
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT IF I LEFT MY MOM ALONE.
NOW YOU SAY IT'S ALL RIGHT WHEN YOU HAVE NO IDEA...
...HOW HARD IT'S BEEN FOR ME. HOW DYING SEEMS PREFERABLE!
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
YOU KILLED MY MOTHER.
YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING...
...SO DON'T SMILE LIKE EVERYTHING'S FINE!

NO.
STAY AWAY FROM ME.
I DON'T...
...WANT TO TALK ANYMORE.
...SAYING THAT TO NAHO.
I'M NOT...
SLAP

I'M SORRY, NAHO.
...GOING TO HURT YOU ANY MORE.
I'M NOT...
I'M SORRY.
FROM NOW ON...
...LEAVE ME ALONE.
...WHAT SHOULD I DO?
BUT...
HAVE TO GET MY ACT TOGETHER.
HAVE TO BECOME STRONG.

I WANT TO DO IT OVER.
ALL OF IT, FROM THE BEGINNING.
WE NEVER...
...SHOULD HAVE BECOME FRIENDS.
...SHE WOULD STILL BE ALIVE.
IF I...
...MOM, GRANDMA, NAHO, EVERYONE.
I WOULDN'T HAVE HURT...
...HAD KEPT MY PROMISE TO MOM THEN...

EASY FOR YOU TO SAY.
"EVEN IF THE GOING IS TOUGH NOW, HANG IN THERE AND IT'LL GET BETTER."
BUT YOU DON'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE UNLESS YOU DIE.
"A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD BE SAD IF YOU DIED."
PEOPLE OFTEN SAY,
HANGING IN THERE... LIVING... IS THE TOUGHEST THING THERE IS.
ON NEW YEAR'S EVE...
KAKERU.
...I TOLD NAHO HOW I FELT ABOUT HER.
IF IT WOULD RELEASE ME FROM MY REGRETS...
...I'D BE READY TO DIE ANYTIME.

AREN'T YOU GONNA DO THE SAME?
CONFESS MY FEELINGS?
WHY WOULD I?
I'M NOT IN LOVE WITH NAHO...
...OR ANYTHING.
...
I THINK YOU AND NAHO...
...SHOULD JUST TAKE THE PLUNGE AND GO OUT WITH EACH OTHER.
YOU HAVE MY BLESSING.

HELL YEAH, I SAW IT!
DID YOU CATCH THE SOCCER GAME LAST NIGHT?
The one late at night...
THEY'RE GOING ON ABOUT SOCCER AGAIN.
GUYS, PICK A TOPIC I CAN JOIN IN ON!
THANKS.
OKAY...
I WONDER WHAT NAHO'S RESPONSE TO HIM WAS.
BUT
IF NAHO AND SUWA DO START DATING, I'LL HAVE PEACE OF MIND
I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO ASK
THAT'S THE TRUTH

IS THAT VALENTINE'S DAY CHOCOLATE?
YOU GIVING IT TO SOME-BODY?
WAA!
...YEAH.
SOME-BODY YOU REALLY LIKE?
HUH...
...YEAH.
HUH.
IS IT SUWA?
SUWA, RIGHT?
SUWA, HUH?

"I'M NOT IN LOVE WITH NAHO..."

I'M A LIAR.

I MEANT IT AS A JOKE...

...BUT NAHO LOOKED ME RIGHT IN THE EYE WHEN SHE ANSWERED.

THAT'S WHY I WAS KIND OF LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

...WATCHED FIREWORKS TOGETHER AT THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL.

THE TWO OF US...

...STUDIED FOR A TEST TOGETHER IN THE LIBRARY.

THE TWO OF US...

"I DON'T WANT TO TALK ANYMORE."

THAT'S NONSENSE.

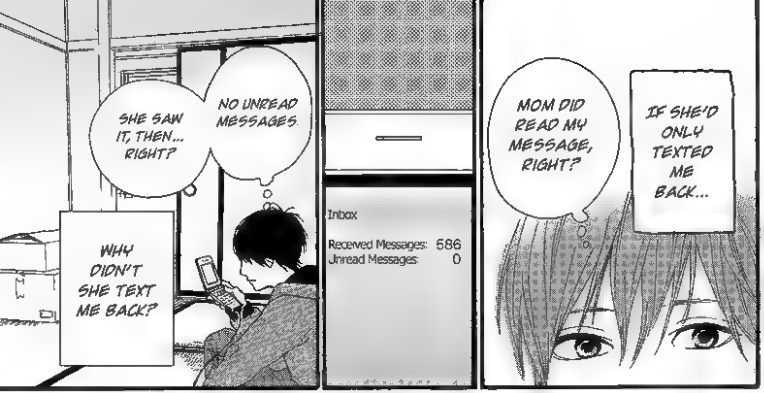
THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.

"STAY AWAY FROM ME."

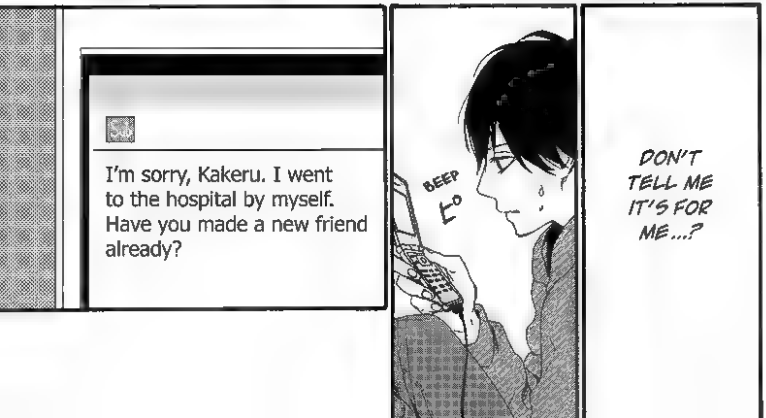
I'VE NEVER WANTED TO BE CLOSER.

NAHO.
GOOD MORNING.
YOU KNOW...
I WANTED TO WALK WITH HER.
IT'S COLD TODAY...
...ISN'T IT?

BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT...
I WANTED TO ASK HER SOMETHING.
IDIOT.
"IT'S COLD." SHEESH.
YEAH... IT IS COLD.
I NEVER GOT TO APOLOGIZE TO MOM.
...BUT I SHOULD REALLY APOLOGIZE.
I'VE BEEN IGNORING IT LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENED...
...I HAVEN'T APOLOGIZED TO HER FOR NEW YEAR'S YET.
ゴト CLACK
I'LL APOLOGIZE THEN.
I'M SURE I'LL GET TO SEE MOM AGAIN WHEN I DIE
MOM'S CELL PHONE...
I WONDER IF MOM HAS A GRUDGE AGAINST ME.
SOMETHING FELL.
HM?


NO UNREAD MESSAGES
SHE SAW IT, THEN... RIGHT?
WHY DIDN'T SHE TEXT ME BACK?
Inbox
Received Messages: 586
Jnread Messages: 0
MOM DID READ MY MESSAGE, RIGHT?
IF SHE'D ONLY TEXTED ME BACK...

Draft Messages Box
Unsent Messages. 1
SHE SHOULD'VE CHEWED ME OUT...
AN UNSENT TEXT...?


I'm sorry, Kakeru. I went to the hospital by myself. Have you made a new friend already?
BEEP
DON'T TELL ME IT'S FOR ME...?

There are many things I have to apologize to you for.

I noticed that you were getting bullied by the seniors in your club at the high school in Tokyo.

I couldn't really ask you about it because you hid it from me.

But I thought changing schools would solve the problem, so I moved us here to Matsumoto.

I'm sorry for divorcing your father when you were young, even though you loved him.

But he was a violent man and I couldn't stand to see him hurt you. That's why I divorced him.

I didn't want you to join a club here and be hurt again.

I was also worried about whether you would be able to make good friends.

I'm sorry for being so selfish. I tried to help you, but didn't consider your feelings.

Ultimately, I'm the one who hurt you.

I'm sorry for getting in the way.
From now on, I want you to have fun, Kakeru. I want you to do what you want to do.
I'm sorry for getting in the way.
I've been so selfish.
I'M SORRY.
THIS IS MY FAULT. I'M SORRY.
KAKERU, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I WANTED HER TO TALK TO ME LIKE THIS IN THE END.
UNTIL NOW, I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING..

I WONDER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE.
DO YOUR REGRETS DISAPPEAR, TOO?
DO YOUR SINS BECOME ATONED FOR?
I WONDER IF ANYONE WOULD BE SAD IF I DIED.
I WONDER IF IT WOULD GET BETTER TOMORROW.
I WONDER WHO NAHO GAVE THAT CHOCOLATE TO.

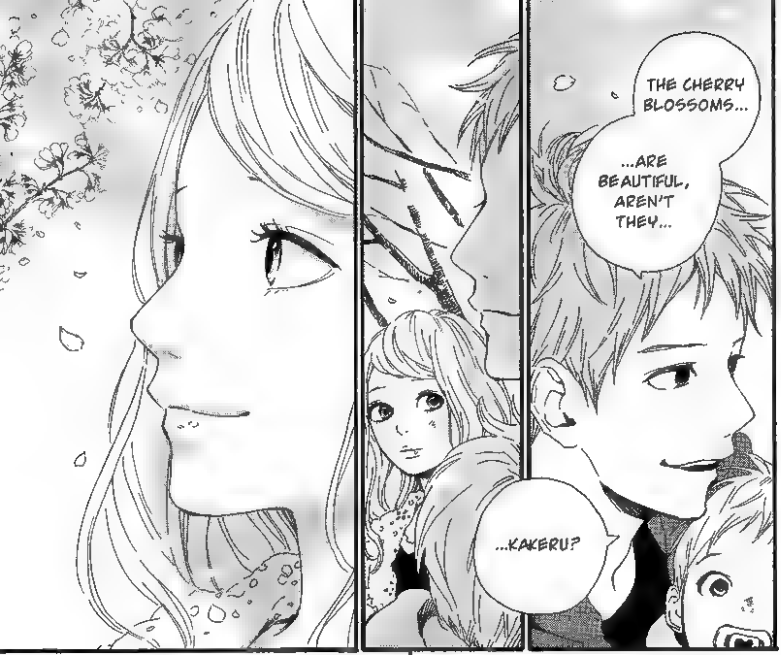
キィ
SKREEEE
I GUESS
NONE OF IT
REALLY
MATTERS.

CHAPTER 20

...AND TALKING ABOUT KAKERU MADE ME FEEL LIKE WE WERE ALL A GROUP AGAIN.

GATHERING TOGETHER LIKE THIS TODAY...

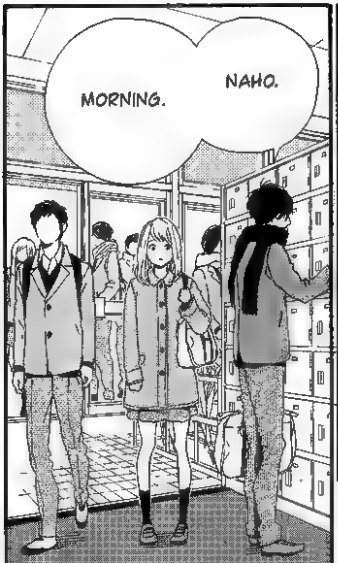
AFTER KAKERU DIED, THE REST OF US SORT OF DRIFTED APART.


THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS...
...ARE BEAUTIFUL, AREN'T THEY...
...KAKERU?

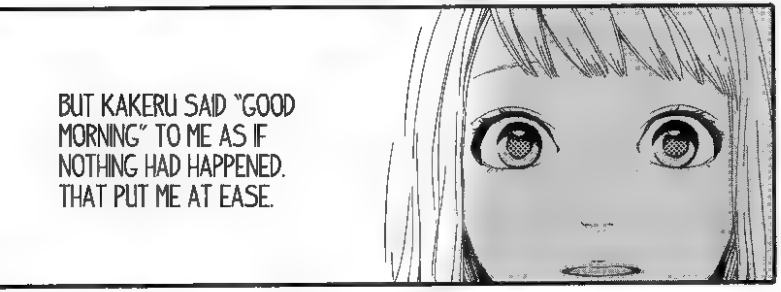
ALL OF MT. KOBO LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN DYED THE COLOR OF CHERRY BLOSSOMS.
SUWA AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR KAKERU HERE EVERY YEAR.

JANUARY 7TH

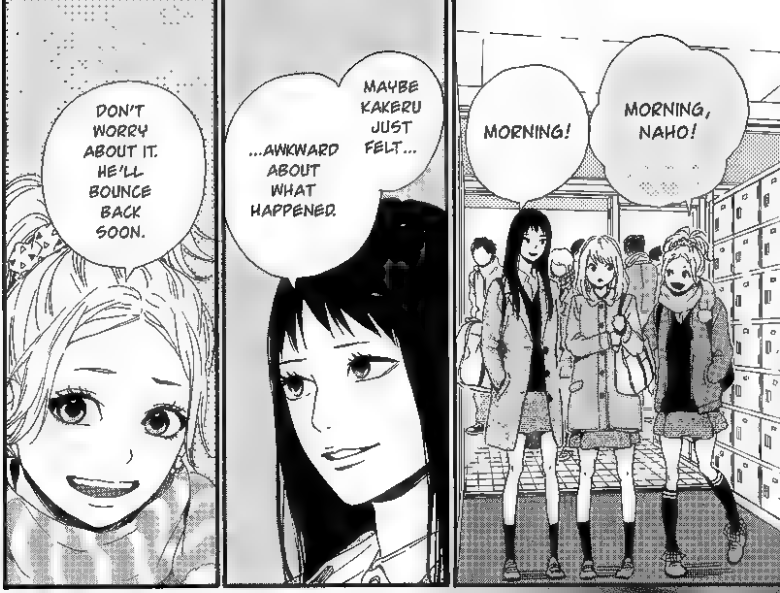
AS WINTER VACATION ENDED, THE FIGHT I HAD WITH KAKERU ON NEW YEAR'S EVE WAS STILL UNRESOLVED. THAT MORNING, I SAW KAKERU BY THE DOORS AT SCHOOL, BUT I COULDN'T ACT NORMAL.

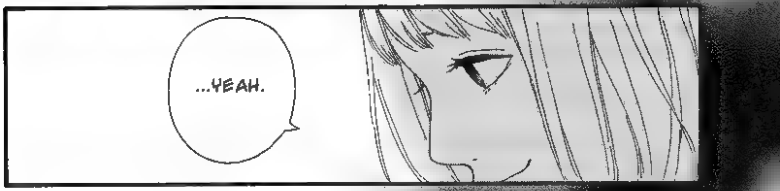


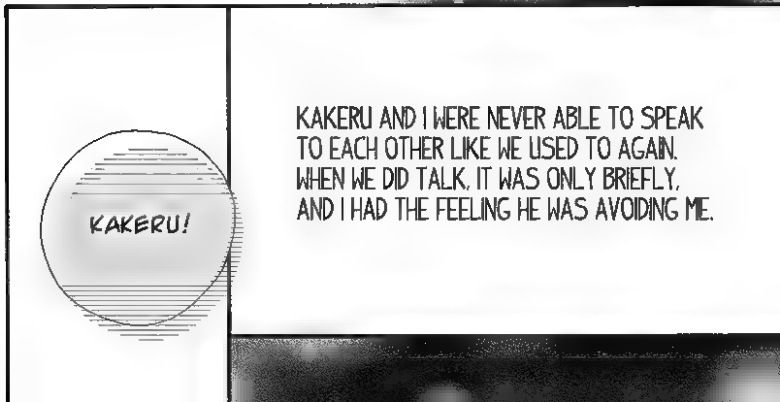
GOOD MORNING...
...KAKERU.

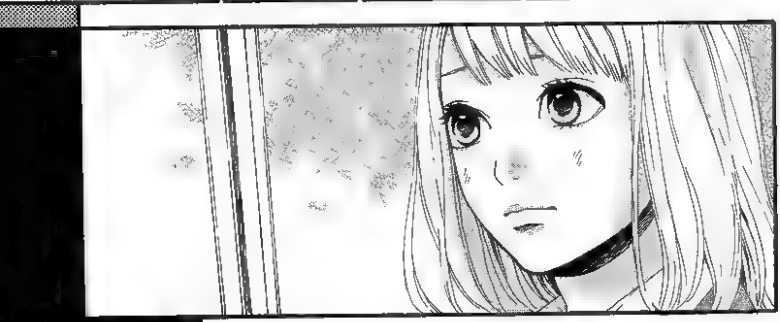

BUT KAKERU SAID "GOOD MORNING" TO ME AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED. THAT PUT ME AT EASE.

NAKA-YAMA, WAIT UP!
AH, SORRY.
KAKERU...
I KEPT TRYING TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU OVER THE BREAK...
MY CELL PHONE BROKE.
HUH?


DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. HE'LL BOUNCE BACK SOON.
...AWKWARD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.
MAYBE KAKERU JUST FELT...
MORNING!
MORNING, NAHO!


...YEAH.


KAKERU!
KAKERU AND I WERE NEVER ABLE TO SPEAK TO EACH OTHER LIKE WE USED TO AGAIN. WHEN WE DID TALK, IT WAS ONLY BRIEFLY, AND I HAD THE FEELING HE WAS AVOIDING ME.



THE NEXT DAY AND THE DAY AFTER THAT,
WE EXCHANGED GREETINGS, BUT DIDN'T TALK.
HE NEVER BROUGHT UP WHAT HAD HAPPENED ON
NEW YEAR'S EVE, SO I PUT IT OUT OF MY HEAD, TOO.

I WANT YOU TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH KAKERU AND TALK TO HIM A LOT TO KEEP THE RIFT BETWEEN US FROM WIDENING.

EVEN IF IT DOESN'T GO WELL, BE SURE TO APOLOGIZE THIS TIME.

I'M SORRY FOR BEING...
...SO INSENSITIVE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE AND HURTING YOU.
I SPOKE OUT OF SELFISHNESS, WITHOUT KNOWING HOW YOU FELT.

NAHO...
I'M SORRY I ACTED LIKE SUCH A HEEL.
YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG, NAHO.
JUST THE OPPOSITE. IT'S MY FAULT FOR MAKING YOU WORRY.
NOT AT ALL! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR!
SO... UM...
I WANT TO MAKE UP...
...IF YOU DON'T MIND!
Ha ha!

THANK GOODNESS...
HUH? REALLY?!
Ha ha ha!
IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAD A FIGHT.
"MAKE UP," THOUGH?
YEAH, SURE.
CONSIDER IT DONE.
SO, UM...
MAYBE WE CAN WALK HOME TOGETHER TODAY?
RESOLVED SO SIMPLY, AND YET, I COULDN'T DO IT BEFORE NOW.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
KAKERU WASN'T ACTUALLY THAT BOTHERED BY IT.
I... I MEAN, JUST THE TWO OF US...
BUT I'VE GOT THE CLUB TODAY.
THAT'S OKAY.
I'LL WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE DONE!

HM...
BUT IT WON'T BE FINISHED UNTIL DARK.
WHY DON'T WE DO IT ANOTHER DAY?
...
NUH UH.
I'LL WAIT FOR YOU.
IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE A CURFEW OR ANYTHING.
WHENEVER YOU FINISH, KAKERU...
NO, I DON'T WANT YOU TO WAIT.
LET'S DO IT ANOTHER DAY.

DING DONG
CLASS IS ABOUT TO START, HUH?
DING DONG
"MAKE UP"?
NO. WE HAVEN'T RESOLVED IT YET.
KAKERU IS AVOIDING ME.
JUST APOLOGIZING ISN'T GOING TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US...
AH!

HEY, LET ME BORROW SOMETHING TO WRITE WITH!
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
!
I FORGOT MY PENCIL CASE.
...
KAKERU...
WANT TO USE THIS?
...
THAT'S OKAY. I ALREADY BORROWED SOMETHING.
WOULD AN ERASER HELP...?
I HAVE AN EXTRA.
SURE.

"I FORGOT MY PENCIL CASE."
"YOU CAN USE MY EXTRA MECHANICAL PENCIL AND ERASER."
"HUH?! ERASER, TOO?!"
"WOW, NAHO. IT'S LIKE YOU KNEW I FORGOT IT!"
LET'S GET STARTED.
Take your mark.
BATTLE
BATTLE
THANK YOU.
EVEN THOUGH I'M FOLLOWING THE LETTER, IT'S NOT WORKING OUT.
WHAT CAN I SAY TO KAKERU...
...TO MAKE HIM SMILE?
AT THIS POINT, IT'S LIKE THE TWO OF US ARE FURTHER APART THAN WHEN WE FIRST MET.
HOW CAN I GET BACK TO THE WAY WE WERE?
WILL TALKING TO HIM LIKE THIS REALLY BE ENOUGH...
...TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US?

I MAY LOSE HIM BECAUSE OF WHAT I SAID.
THIS...
THAT...
IT ALL...
...MIGHT GO TO WASTE.
"STAY AWAY FROM ME."
MAYBE...
"I DON'T WANT TO TALK ANYMORE."
...HE ALREADY HATES ME.
TAKA-MIYA.
!

TAKAMIYA.
READ...
...THE NEXT PASSAGE.
...
WHAT'S WRONG, TAKAMIYA?
STOP.
TAP

I'LL...
..READ THE PASSAGE

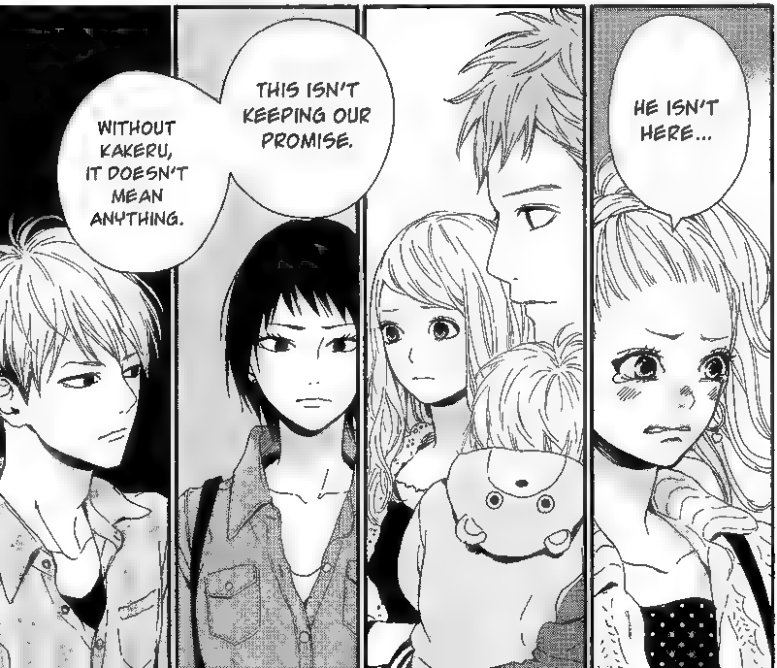
"I HAVE MY EYE ON YOU."
"I'M CURIOUS."
I WONDER IF KAKERU...
...STILL FEELS THE WAY HE DID BACK THEN.

IN THE SPRING, WE'LL VIEW THE BLOOMING CHERRY BLOSSOMS ON MT. KOBO.
IN THE SUMMER, WE'LL GO TO KAMI-KOCHI.
IN THE FALL, WE'LL SEE THE RED LEAVES AT ALPS PARK.
IN THE WINTER, WE'LL GO TO MATSUMOTO CASTLE WHEN IT'S SNOWING.
THE PROMISE THE SIX OF US MADE WHEN WE BURIED THE TIME CAPSULE.
LET'S FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE WHOLE THING.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WAS TEN YEARS AGO. IT FEELS SO WEIRD.
EVEN NOW, I OFTEN THINK ABOUT THAT DAY WE FIRST MET...
...AND WALKED HOME WITH KAKERU.
WHO WAS IT THAT DID THAT?
...INVITED HIM TO WALK BACK WITH US AFTER THE OPENING CEREMONY.
BUT...
...MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T HAVE...
...HE WOULD STILL BE ALIVE?
THEN IF WE HADN'T BECOME FRIENDS WITH KAKERU...
ME, TOO.
I INVITED HIM, TOO.
I INVITED HIM.
IT'S MY FAULT.

IT'S NO ONE'S FAULT.
THE RESULTS WOULD'VE BEEN THE SAME.
AND WHAT IF HE'D MADE A PROMISE TO HIS MOM TO GET HOME EARLY ON THAT DAY, TOO?
WE JUST SHOULD HAVE ASKED HIM TO WALK BACK WITH US ON ANOTHER DAY, NOT THE DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY.
I WOULDN'T WANT THAT!
NOT BECOME FRIENDS WITH HIM...?
EVEN IF WE FEEL REGRET, NATURE TOOK ITS COURSE.
IF WE HADN'T MADE A MISTAKE SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, KAKERU WOULD STILL BE ALIVE!
HEY!
THAT'S NOT TRUE!

WAAAAAAH!
あああ
DON'T FIGHT!
KAKERU'S WITH US TODAY!
UNH...


HE ISN'T HERE...
THIS ISN'T KEEPING OUR PROMISE.
WITHOUT KAKERU, IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING.

THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN GET HIM BACK.
NO MATTER WHAT WE DO, IT'S TOO LATE.
WHAT ABOUT A TIME CAPSULE?
CAN'T WE SEND ONE BACK TO THE PAST?
YOU CAN SEND ONE TO THE FUTURE, AFTER ALL...
WELL, DUH.
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE YOU SEND IT TO THE FUTURE. TIME JUST PASSES, THAT'S ALL.
I KNOW THAT!
OH?
I GUESS WE'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE INVENTS A TIME MACHINE.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! YOU'D BE WAITING UNTIL THE END OF TIME!
GASP
WHAT ABOUT A BLACK HOLE?
BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL, NAKANO-SENSEI TOLD US ABOUT THEM!

NAKANO-SENSEI SAID TIME TRAVEL MAY BE POSSIBLE WITH A BLACK HOLE.
A BLACK HOLE.
YOU WEREN'T LISTENING, WERE YOU?
SO, WHAT WERE WE TALKING ABOUT?
NAKANO-SENSEI! THAT BRINGS BACK MEMORIES.
I wonder how he's doing...
All of what you're saying!
THAT'S IMPOSSI-BLE!
...WE'LL BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THE PAST!
THEN IF WE GO TO SPACE AND ENTER A BLACK HOLE...
WHAT?!
...SO GIVE IT UP!
THERE'S NO WAY TO FIX THE PAST...
A TIME MACHINE.
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BUILD ONE OUR-SELVES.
THIS ISN'T SOME SCHOOL PROJECT!
I SAID IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
BESIDES, EVEN IF YOU DID ENTER A BLACK HOLE, YOU'D NEVER BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THIS WORLD.
R... REALLY?

...
WELL, THERE IS A PLACE ON EARTH...
...CALLED A BLACK HOLE.
WH...
WHERE?! WHERE?! WHERE?!
IT'S JUST A MYTH, AND ALL...
...SO DON'T...
WHERE IS IT?!

OCEAN...?
ALSO CALLED THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE. IT'S IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.
THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE.
ONE HYPOTHESIS GOES THAT THERE'S A BLACK HOLE.
...HAVE SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE.
FOR CENTURIES, SHIPS AND PLANES PASSING THROUGH THAT AREA...
THAT'S WHAT SOME PEOPLE SPECU-LATE.
...TRAVELED THROUGH TIME?
THEN MAYBE THOSE VANISHING SHIPS AND PLANES...

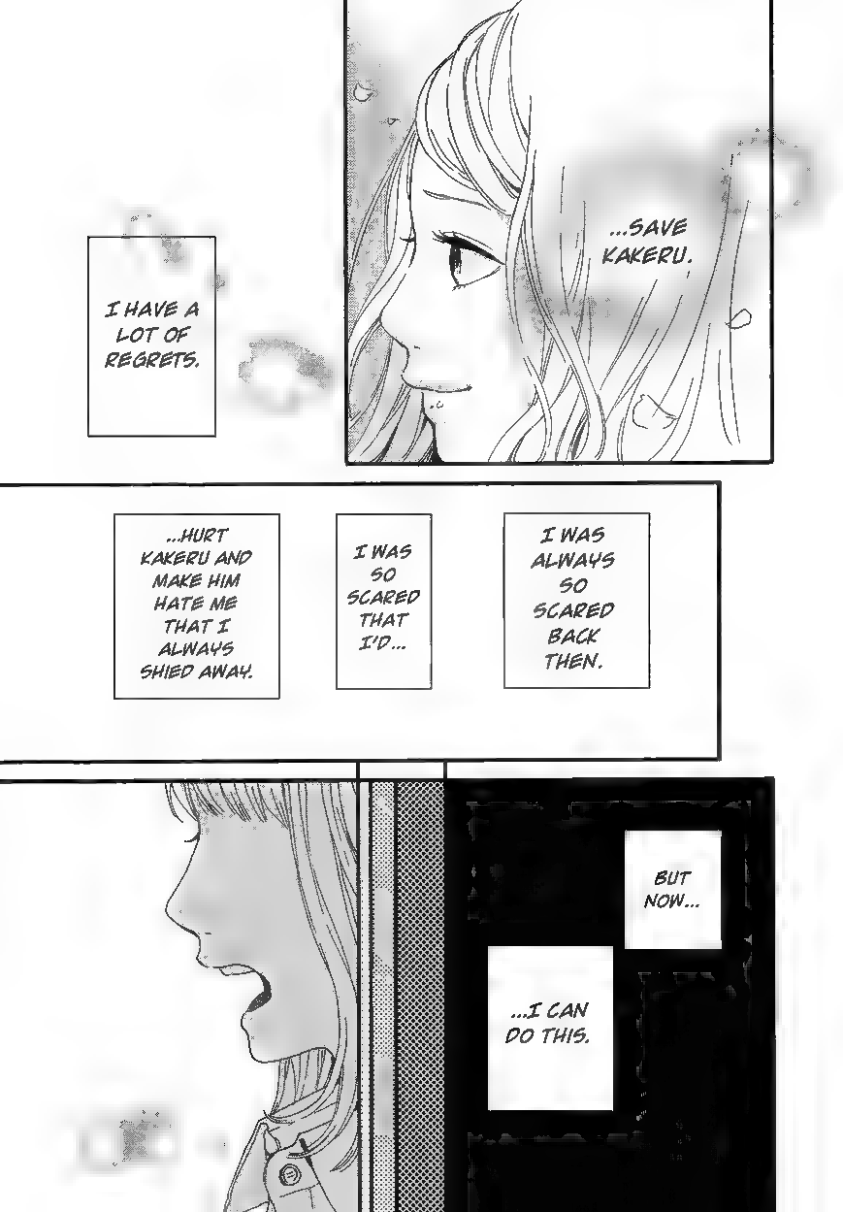
BUT RECENTLY...
...THOSE MYSTERIES HAVE BEEN CLEARED UP, SO IT'S ONLY A LEGEND.
TIME TRAVEL ISN'T POSSIBLE...
IT ISN'T A LEGEND!
LET'S TRY GOING THERE!
BUT EVEN IF WE DID TRAVEL THROUGH TIME, WHO KNOWS WHERE WE'D END UP?
AND EITHER WAY, WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RETURN, RIGHT?
WHAT ABOUT LETTERS?
WHY DON'T WE JUST TRY SENDING LETTERS? LIKE IN A TIME CAPSULE?
THAT'S IT!

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF IT GOT SENT TO THE FUTURE INSTEAD OF THE PAST?
AND EVEN IF YOU SENT IT TO THE PAST, YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE IT WOULD BE DELIVERED!
HOW WOULD YOU GET LETTERS TO OUR PAST SELVES?
IN THIS TIME CAPSULE...
...DO YOU PLAN ON LEAVING A NOTE, LIKE, "PLEASE DELIVER THESE LETTERS TO OUR SECOND-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL SELVES IN APRIL 2012 AT THESE ADDRESSES"?
RIDICULOUS!
LIKE I KEEP SAYING, TIME TRAVEL IS IMPOSS...
THAT'S IT!

BUT IF WE DO...
IT WON'T.
WE'D HAVE TO MAKE A MIRACLE HAPPEN.
NO WAY.
...WE MAY BE ABLE TO CHANGE THE FUTURE!
WON'T WORK.
IF WE WRITE LETTERS TO OUR PAST SELVES AND PUT THEM OUT TO SEA...
LET'S GO WITH THAT!

...WE CAN SAVE KAKERU.

I WANT TO...


...SAVE KAKERU.
I HAVE A LOT OF REGRETS.
...HURT KAKERU AND MAKE HIM HATE ME THAT I ALWAYS SHIED AWAY.
I WAS SO SCARED THAT I'D...
I WAS ALWAYS SO SCARED BACK THEN.
BUT NOW...
...I CAN DO THIS.

...I DON'T CARE.

NOW...

...LOSE KAKERU.

I JUST DON'T WANT TO...

...OR HE HATES ME, FINE.

IF I HURT HIM...

WE MAY HAVE...
...LOST KAKERU...
...BECAUSE OF SOMETHING I SAID.

...THAT CAN'T...

...AND A FUTURE...

...THERE'S A FUTURE THAT CAN BE CHANGED...

IF...

CHAPTER 21

KAKERU...
GOOD MORNING!
MORNING!

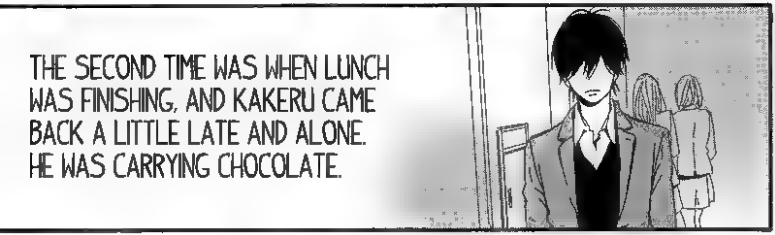
FEBRUARY 14TH
THE DAY BEFORE KAKERU DIES.
MAKE VALENTINE'S CHOCOLATE IN HOME EC.
I MADE CHOCOLATE FOR KAKERU WITHOUT LETTING ANYONE KNOW.
NAHO'S CHOCOLATE IS SO CUTE!
I'M SURE KAKERU WILL BE HAPPY...
...TO GET IT.
GOOD LUCK!
YEAH!

THE PLAN WAS TO GIVE HIM THE CHOCOLATE AND TELL HIM HOW I REALLY FELT.
BUT I COULDN'T START A CONVERSATION WITH HIM, EVEN THOUGH I HAD PLENTY OF CHANCES.

THE FIRST TIME WAS AFTER HOME EC, WHEN KAKERU SAW THE CHOCOLATE I WAS HOLDING AND ASKED ME WHO IT WAS FOR.

NO, THAT'S NOT THE POINT.
HUH?
KAKERU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO ME...
I WAS...
...WAITING FOR KAKERU TO SAY SOMETHING TO ME.
BUT I'M THE ONE...
...WHO HAS TO MAKE THE MOVE.
WHAT THE HECK?
...I ONLY MADE CHOCOLATE FOR MY DAD!
I SAID...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING

S-SORRY.
I FORGOT ABOUT YOU TWO...
!
I CAN IMAGINE YOU TRAILING AFTER US FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.
Write a letter of apology in the future!
YOU'LL REGRET NOT GIVING US CHOCOLATE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIVES!

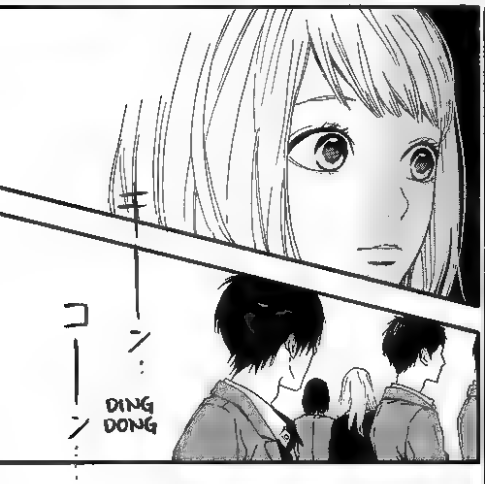

THE SECOND TIME WAS WHEN LUNCH WAS FINISHING, AND KAKERU CAME BACK A LITTLE LATE AND ALONE. HE WAS CARRYING CHOCOLATE.

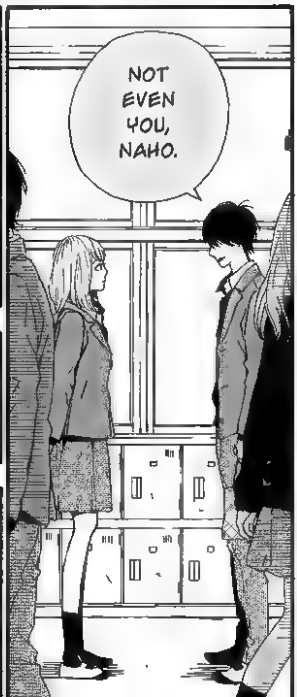
WHERE'D YOU GET THAT CHOCO-LATE?
KAKERU...

I DIDN'T KNOW HER...
...BUT SHE WAS CUTE.
THIS?
HOW'D YOU KNOW IT WAS CHOCOLATE?
A FRESHMAN GIRL...
...JUST GAVE IT TO ME.

FORGET HER!

DON'T WORRY. I'M NOT GONNA GO OUT WITH HER.
Ha ha!



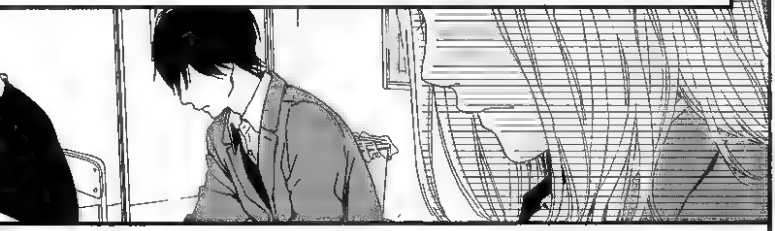


THE THIRD TIME WAS AFTER FIFTH PERIOD. KAKERU WAS BUYING A DRINK FROM A VENDING MACHINE.

THE FOURTH
TIME WAS MY
LAST CHANCE.

AFTER SCHOOL, KAKERU TOLD ME, "GOOD LUCK GIVING IT TO HIM" AND THEN LEFT. I SHOULD HAVE STOPPED HIM THEN OR GONE AFTER HIM, BUT I WASN'T CAPABLE OF DOING THE SIMPLEST THING IN THE END.

BUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT NOW, I REALIZE HOW DIFFICULT THAT WAS FOR ME. IF I COULD DO IT OVER AGAIN, WOULD I SUCCEED IN GIVING KAKERU THE CHOCOLATE AND CONFESSING MY LOVE TO HIM?



DON'T PUT OFF WHAT YOU CAN'T DO TO "TOMORROW" OR "SOMEDAY." FOR KAKERU'S SAKE, DO ANYTHING YOU CAN DO.

AND ON THAT NOTE, WE'LL WRAP IT UP.

DING DONG DING DONG

CHANGE THE FUTURE. GOOD LUCK.

KAKERU!
ガタン
RATTLE
...
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR NARUSE, HE ALREADY LEFT.
TAP

...YEAH!
SHOULD WE GO AFTER HIM, TOO?
...
IT'LL BE OKAY.
IT'LL BE OKAY.
I'M NOT GOING DOWN THE SAME PATH.
I WILL NOT RUN AWAY.
THIS TIME FOR SURE, I'LL GIVE HIM THE CHOCOLATE.
BUMP

WHUMP
OW!
LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING!
-ENCA-
-ENCA

...
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
THE CHOCO-LATE!
HUH?!
I... I'M SORRY!
HUH?
YOU'RE NOT-ME.
TOO BAD.
...BUT I WOULDN'T NOW IF I WERE YOU.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU WERE GONNA GIVE THAT TO...
CHUCKLE
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO BE? CHOCOLATE?
IT GOT STEPPED ON.

I'M GOING TO SEE KAKERU...
...SO PLEASE STEP ASIDE!
THE CHOCOLATE IS IMPORTANT.
I HAVE TO CHANGE THE FUTURE.
...
BORING.
Tch.

I JUST HAVE TO CHANGE IT.
ガチャ CLACK
?
RUSTLE
There's something I want to give you, so don't go home yet.
KAKERU!!

#UFF
#UFF
THERE WAS SOMETHING I WANTED TO GIVE YOU...
...BUT I'M SORRY. I DON'T HAVE IT RIGHT NOW.
I PROMISE I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU, THOUGH.
SO... WILL YOU WAIT A LITTLE WHILE?
...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
I... DON'T NEED ANYTHING.
WELL, SEE YA.

I... DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANY REGRETS.
I WANT TO TALK TO YOU, EVEN IF IT'S JUST FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES.
WAIT.
ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOMETHING I WANT HIM TO KNOW.
I'M THINKING, BUT I CAN'T COME UP WITH ANY ANSWERS.
HOW CAN I GET HIM TO SMILE?
WHAT.. SHOULD I SAY TO KAKERU?

I GOT A FINAL TEXT FROM KAKERU ON FEBRUARY 15TH.

HE ASKED WHO I'D GIVEN THE CHOCOLATE TO, AND SAID HE FELT BAD ABOUT GETTING ANGRY AT ME ON NEW YEAR'S EVE. I REPLIED TO HIS TEXT, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF HE READ IT OR NOT.

IF WE'D SOLVED THE MIS-UNDER-STANDING, THEN...

WE SHOULD'VE TALKED ABOUT IT.

THAT WAS BOTHERING KAKERU ALL THIS TIME...

I WANT YOU TO TELL HIM WHAT WAS IN MY REPLY. FACE TO FACE. TELL HIM...

"I'M NOT HURT."

"...OR IF WE FIGHT. I JUST WANT TO TALK TO YOU, KAKERU."
"I DON'T CARE IF I GET HURT..."
"...IT'S HARD NOW, NOT BEING ABLE TO TALK LIKE WE USED TO."
"BUT..."
"I'M SORRY. IT'S MY FAULT."
"I'M SORRY, KAKERU."

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, NAHO.
I...
...WAS WEAK...
...SO I KEPT RUNNING AWAY.
I WAS SCARED...
...THAT IF I HURT YOU, YOU WOULD HATE ME.
AND I COULDN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF THAT...
...SO I DIDN'T WANT TO GET CLOSE.

THE TRUTH IS, I DID WANT YOU TO GIVE ME CHOCOLATE.
I'M SORRY FOR ALWAYS LYING TO YOU.
WHEN YOU ASKED ME TO WALK HOME TOGETHER...
...I WAS THRILLED.
TO BE HONEST...
...I WANT TO BE WITH YOU, NAHO.
WHEN YOU KEPT TRYING TO TALK TO ME...
...AND SAID GOOD MORNING, IT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF MY DAY.
...ME, TOO.

KAKERU...
...ALL THIS TIME.
I'VE BEEN RUNNING AWAY...
I...
...W... W... WA...
...AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WON'T MATCH UP AT ALL.
...FEARING THAT ITS CON-TENTS...
I MIGHT HAVE BEEN AFRAID TO LOOK AT THE LETTER EVEN MORE...
THE FUTURE HAS CHANGED A LOT.

FEARING A FUTURE THAT'S NOT WRITTEN IN THE LETTER...
I WANT TO...
...GO OUT WITH YOU...
...KAKERU.

BUT I WANT TO KNOW, A LOT MORE.
I KNOW YOU...
...AND YET, I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT YOU.
WHAT YOU ENJOY DOING, WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY...

I WANT TO BE CLOSE TO YOU SO I CAN ALWAYS HELP YOU, KAKERU.
I WANT TO KNOW ALL OF IT.
WHAT I CAN SAY THAT WOULD PLEASE YOU...
BUT...
...YOU ONCE SAID THAT IF I ASKED YOU OUT, YOU WOULD AGREE.
...I'M NOT GOING TO DATE ANYONE.
BUT I TOLD YOU...
BUT...
THAT'S OKAY. DON'T WORRY.
I MAY LIE AND RUN AWAY FROM YOU AGAIN.
NAHO, I CAN'T MAKE YOU HAPPY.
IF YOU'RE HAPPY, I'M HAPPY, KAKERU.

...TELL ME EVERY-THING.
YOU CAN...

I HATE MYSELF.
I CAN'T FORGIVE MYSELF.
...IT'S SO HARD.

SOME-TIMES...
...I JUST WANT TO THROW IT ALL AWAY. YOU AND EVERYTHING ELSE, NAHO.
THAT'S WHEN I LOSE THE POINT OF LIVING.
BUT I KNOW I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS.
I WANT TO BE STRONG.
I WANT TO...
...BE HAPPY.
...YEAH.
LET'S DO IT.

AS LONG AS YOU LIVE...
...THAT'S ENOUGH FOR ME.
I'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY, KAKERU.
LET'S LIVE OUR LIVES TOGETHER.

...OKAY.
...THAT IF I GOT CLOSE TO KAKERU, HE WOULD DISAPPEAR.
I HAD A FEE-LING...
NAHO...
I THOUGHT IF I TOUCHED HIM, HE MIGHT BREAK.
GIVE ME...
...YOUR CHOCO-LATE.

THE CHOCOLATE YOU'RE HOLDING BEHIND YOUR BACK.
BUT...
...IT'S CRUSHED.
I DON'T CARE.
THANK YOU.

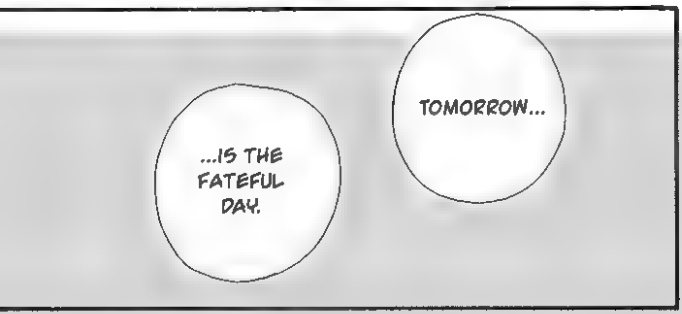
TO ME...
...KAKERU IS LIKE A LIVING TREASURE.
KAKERU!

NAHO GAVE YOU THE CHOCOLATE, RIGHT?!
WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?!

CONGRATU-
LATIONS!

MAY KAKERU'S TOMORROW...
...BE CHANGED.
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?

NAHO ONLY HAS EYES FOR KAKERU.
MY LETTER SAID THAT IF I CONFESSED MY LOVE, SHE WOULD TURN ME DOWN.
SHE DIDN'T MAKE ME CHOCOLATE, EITHER
YOU'RE HARPING ON IT...
I TOLD YOU I WAS FINE WITH IT!
ABOUT NAHO.
THIS WORLD IS FOR KAKERU TO BE HAPPY.
MOST OF ALL, MY FUTURE SELF IS ALREADY LIVING THE DREAM.
I'M FINE WITH HOW IT'S WORKED OUT HERE.
BESIDES, I'VE GOT ONE OTHER DREAM THAT I'M GOING TO MAKE COME TRUE!
OH?
SO DON'T TELL NAHO OR KAKERU ANYTHING ABOUT IT!
YES!!
Like about being married!
YEAH, YEAH.
That's a secret for life!!
WELL... NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WERE SO STUBBORN ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, SUWA.
IT WAS FOR KAKERU'S SAKE, WASN'T IT?



...TO SAVE KAKERU.

OUR FUTURE SELVES, TEN YEARS FROM NOW, CREATED THIS WORLD...

...MUST BE A NEW ONE, AN OFFSHOOT CREATED WHEN THE LETTERS WERE DELIVERED.

THIS WORLD...

Haruiro Astronaut
Final Chapter

OH, CHIKI-CHAN!
GOOD MORNING, NATSUKI-KUN.
GOOD MORNING.
?
SEE YOU LATER!
WELL...
GRIN
GRIN
Ah ha ha!
IT SURE IS WARM TODAY!

BOW
.....
G'MOR-NING!
G-G-G...
? ?
DASH
Today from our Principal
Today's Weather
SURELY ...
IT'S BECAUSE OF THIS COLD.

BLINK.
UWAAAA-AAAAH?!
GYAAA-AAAAA!
WH-WHAT AM I DOING IN THE NURSE'S OFFICE?!
?!
I WAS JUST CHECKING YOUR FEVER!
THAT'S IT! I SWEAR!
ARE YOU OKAY?
THE NURSE SAID YOUR TEMPERATURE WAS REALLY HIGH, CHIKI-CHAN.
NATSUKI-KUN... HOW...?
NATSUKI-KUN BROUGHT YOU HERE.
AND I WAS JUST CHECK-ING YOUR FEVER!

SO NATSUKI-KUN...
WAS THE ONE WHO CARRIED ME HERE.
CHIKI-CHAN...
YOUR FACE IS STILL RED. YOU OKAY?
IT'S YOUR FAULT, TATSUAKI-KUN.

THE REASON I CAUGHT A COLD...
MY...
MY FAULT?
WAS BECAUSE I SLEPT WITH MAMI...
AND SHE HOGGED ALL THE BLANKETS.
THEN THAT COLD...
BECAME THIS FEVER.

AND THIS FEVER...
MUST BE WHY MY HEART IS POUND-ING.
HEY, MAMI.
PRACTICE SHOULD BE OVER EARLY TODAY.
WANNA STOP OFF SOMEWHERE ON THE WAY HOME?
UM...
UH...!

IT'S ALREADY BEEN TWO WEEKS...
WHAT IS IT?
UHM...

I UNDER-STAND.
YEAH. YOU SAID AFTER TWO WEEKS, WE WOULD BREAK UP.

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.
LATER, MAMI.
LET'S BREAK UP.

CHIRRUP
CHIRR CHIRR
CHIRRUP
THINGS WILL GO BACK TO NORMAL.
ONCE I GET OVER MY COLD...
.....

!!
CHIKI, MAMI.
SEE YA...
FINE.
THIS IS...
BYE.
BYE, NATSUKI-KUN!
YUI-KUN.
SEE YA...
...

SEE YOU TOMORROW, MAMI.
!
"IF YOU HURT NATSUKI...
"I WON'T FORGIVE YOU."

CHIKI-CHAN...
YOU LIKE HIM, DON'T YOU?

TATSUAKI-KUN.
I DON'T WANT TO HURT NATSUKI-KUN.
HE TOLD ME HE LIKED ME.
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE SOMEONE HAD EVER SAID THAT TO ME.
SO HAPPY.
I WAS...
SO...

IF MY TRUE FEELINGS ARE GOING TO HURT NATSUKI-KUN...
THEN I WILL JUST KEEP THEM HIDDEN, BURIED DEEP DOWN INSIDE ME.
TP
DON'T...
HURT NATSUKI.
I KNOW, I GET IT.
YOU DON'T.
HUH?
I'M NOT TELLING YOU TO FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM.
THAT'S NOT WHAT NATSUKI WOULD WANT.
JUST...

NATSUKI IS...
A GOOD GUY.
A REALLY GOOD GUY.
Really.
I KNOW.
DON'T LEAD HIM ON.
THAT'S WHAT REALLY HURTS.
SO, DON'T WORRY.
NO MATTER WHAT YOUR ANSWER IS, NATSUKI WILL ACCEPT IT.
BECAUSE HE'S NICE LIKE THAT.
I know.
THESE THINGS CAN'T BE HELPED.

CHIKI...
BE HAPPY.
THIS WHOLE TIME...
I'VE BEEN ENVIOUS OF MAMI.
JEALOUS OF HER THIS WHOLE TIME...
SINCE SHE'S THE ONE YUI-KUN FELL FOR.

THE PERSON I LIKE TELL ME THEY LIKE ME?
TO HEAR...
BE OKAY FOR ME TO WANT...
WOULD IT...
NATSUKI-KUN...
I'M SORRY.
THANKS... FOR LETTING ME KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.
IT'S DISAPPOINT-ING...
BUT I PREPARED MYSELF FOR THIS.
RIGHT ...!
CHIKI-CHAN.
GO FOR IT...

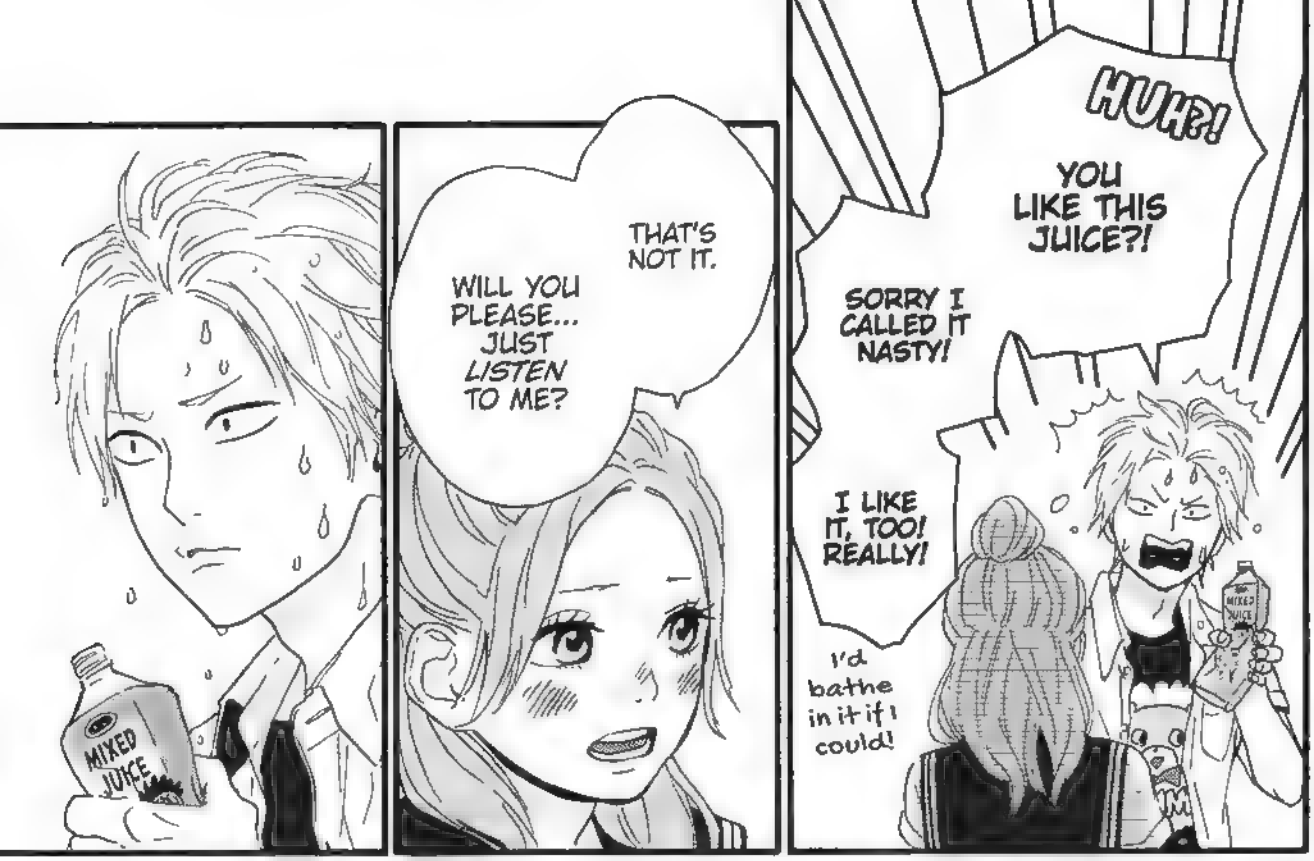
TO HAVE THE PERSON YOU LIKE...
FALL FOR YOU...
IS A MIRACLE.

BUT SOME-DAY...
I HOPE THAT MIRACLE HAPPENS TO ME.
PAT
PAT
PAT
SCREECH

.....
WHAT WERE YOU TALKING TO NATSUKI-KUN ABOUT?
YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF NERVE DUMPING NATSUKI-KUN!
POOR NATSUKI-KUN. WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE SUCH A BITCH?!
You're the worst!
GRIN
MIXED JUICE
HOW ABOUT...
SOME JUICE?
!
MIXED JUICE

Tch!
KER-SPLASH
MIXED JUICE
KUM
WHAT NASTY STUFF!
HUH?
GRAB
WHO'RE YOU CALLIN' A TALKING GORILLA?!
Eek!
WHO ASKED YOU, YOU TALKING GORILLA?!
GET LOST.
CRUNCH
GREAK
MIXED JUICE
DON'T EVER COME NEAR CHIKI-CHAN AGAIN!
That gorilla is scary!
And creepy!

TATSUAKI-KUN...
WELL... THEN I GUESS...
.....
I LIKE--

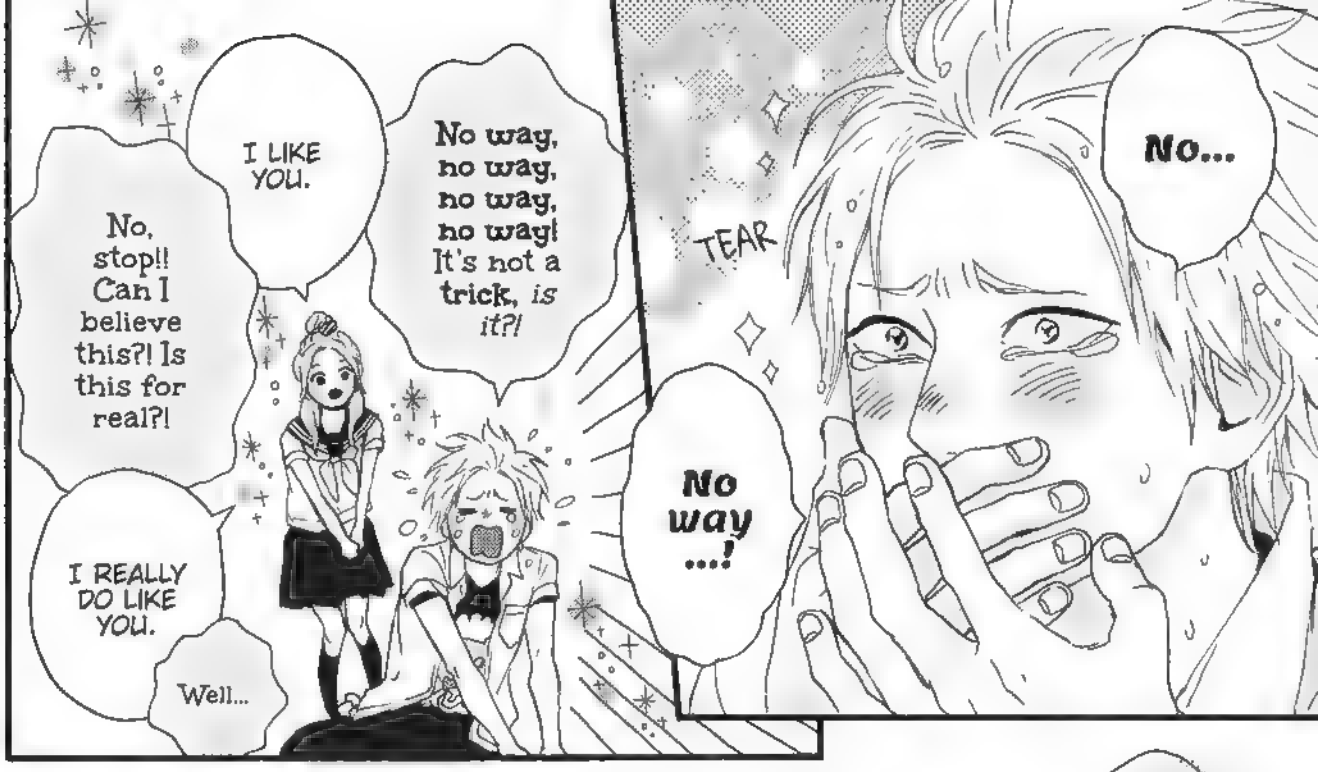

MIXED JUICE
WILL YOU PLEASE... JUST LISTEN TO ME?
THAT'S NOT IT.
HUH?!
YOU LIKE THIS JUICE?!
SORRY I CALLED IT NASTY!
I LIKE IT, TOO! REALLY!
I'd bathe in it if I could!
MIXED JUICE

Is that a yes or a no?
ALL RIGHT.
SHAKE
SHAKE

CHIKI-CHAN, YOU DON'T LIKE ME.
I ALREADY KNOW. I'VE ALREADY REALIZED IT.
SO, IF YOU HAVE SOME-THING TO TELL ME...
I DIDN'T MEAN TO TAIL YOU OR ANYTHING.
WHEN YOU WERE TALKING TO NATSUKI-KUN.
IT'S JUST...I SAW YOU EARLIER...

NATSUKI-KUN SAID...
THAT YOUR FEVER WENT UP BECAUSE OF ME!
BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T LIKE IT WHEN I TOUCHED YOUR WRIST.
IT'S BECAUSE I GOT TOO CLOSE TO YOU...!
BUT I LIKE--
NO, IT'S BECAUSE I LIKE--
IS BECAUSE YOU DON'T LIKE ME, RIGHT?
THE REASON YOU STOPPED SAYING HI TO ME...
I LIKE THIS JUICE, TOO.
?
WHEN WE MAKE EYE CONTACT, YOU LOOK AWAY AND TAKE OFF RUNNING...
IT'S BECAUSE I LIKE YOU.
MIXED JUICE

TATSUAKI-KUN, WHEN YOU TOUCHED MY WRIST, MY HEART STARTED POUNDING.
THE SAME THING HAPPENED WHEN YOU RESCUED ME.
AND I HAD A LOT OF FUN WHEN WE WALKED HOME TOGETHER.
I LIKE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU...
TATSUAKI-KUN.
M...
ME?


No...
TEAR
No way ...!
I LIKE YOU.
No way, no way, no way, no way! It's not a trick, is it?!
No, stop!! Can I believe this?! Is this for real?!
I REALLY DO LIKE YOU.
Well...

BLUUUUSH
MA...
MA-MA-MA-MA-MAMI...

CHIKI-CHAN!!

I'VE LIKED YOU THIS WHOLE TIME!!
ME TOO.
ME...

MAMI.
YOU'VE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT CHIKI THIS WHOLE TIME...
THAT'S WHY, EVEN IF YOU GO OUT WITH A GUY, YOU BREAK UP.

ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?
YEAH!

THEN, EVERYTHING SHOULD BE FINE, RIGHT?
?
COME ON MAMI.
WHAT?

I WANT TO ASK YOU OUT AGAIN.
WHAT'S IT LIKE TO GO OUT, I WONDER.
WHAT DO YOU DO ON A DATE?
HEY...

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME, LET GO.
NO! YOU'RE NOT GOING ANY-WHERE!
I CAN'T DO IT! MY HEART'S POUNDING SO HARD! WE CAN'T WALK HOME ALONE!
COME WITH US ON OUR DATE ON SUNDAY, TOO!!
WHY?!

THIS IS WHAT I'VE CHOSEN.
Back off.
THE ONE AND ONLY BELOVED STAR IN THE UNIVERSE FOR ME.

«End»

Hello, I'm Takano.

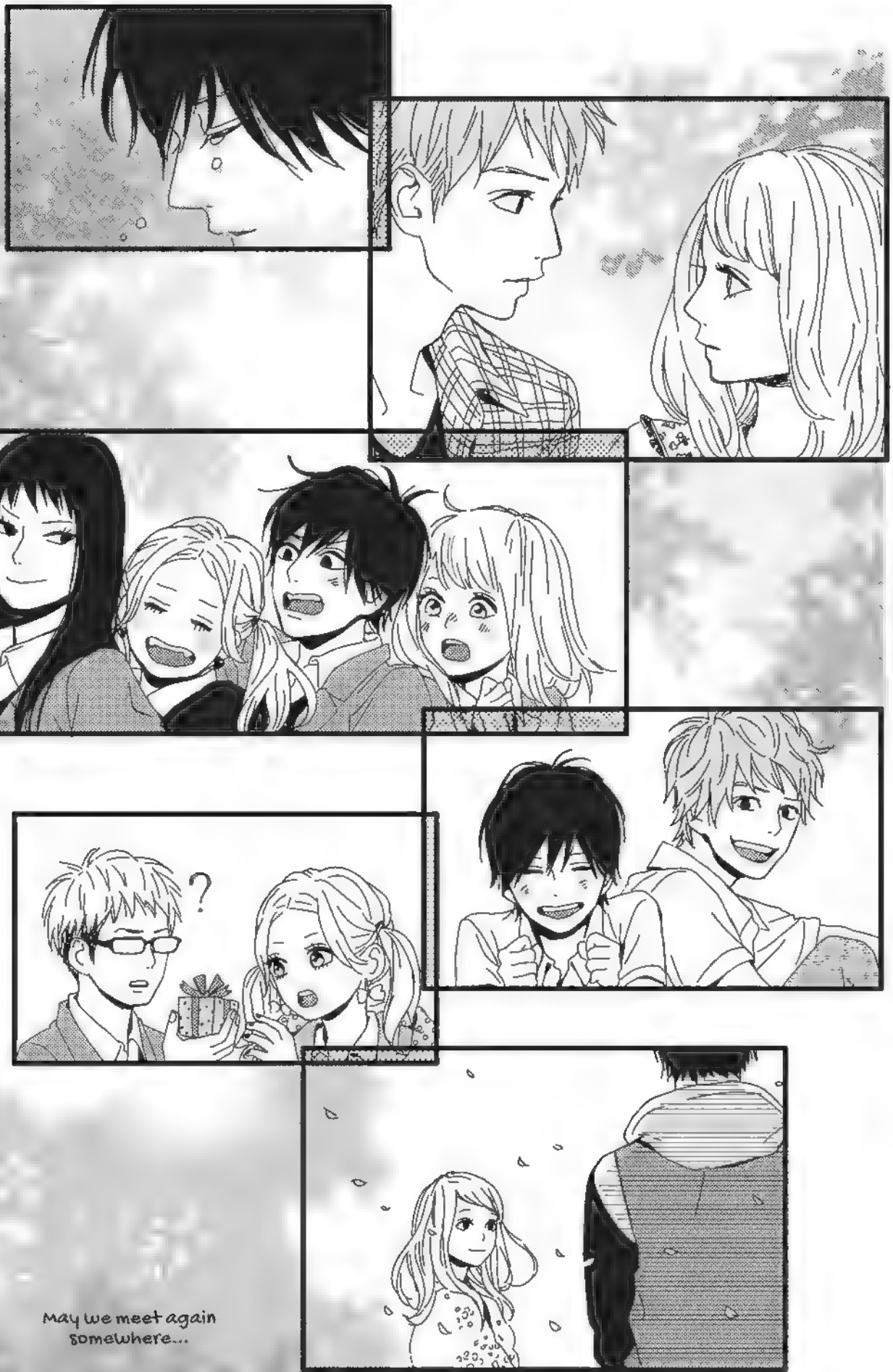
orange has finally finished. To everyone who read until the end, thank you so very, very much. I was able to draw everything I wanted to in this story.

To all of you who read *orange*, I hope your future is a happy one, that you are still going on without regrets ten years from now. If you have someone like Kakeru in your life, please find a way to save them. Every life is precious. Please treasure each and every day, the present, the moment, and yourself.

Thank you very much.

Ichigo Takano

2015.11. 高野苺



Thank you...♡

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..SHE WOULD SEE KAKERU.
..HAD NO IDEA THIS WOULD BE THE LAST DAY...
MY FUTURE SELF, TEN YEARS FROM NOW, WHO SENT ME THE LETTER...
MORNING.
NAHO...
BUT I WON'T LET THIS...
...BE THE LAST DAY.

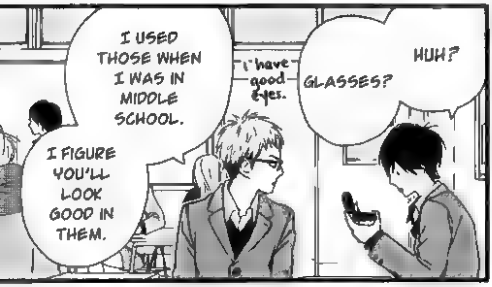
IN THE SPRING OF MY 16TH YEAR...
...I RECEIVED A LETTER.

HOW DID THIS GET DELIVERED?
WHY DID IT COME TO ME...?

FEBRUARY 15TH
IN THE MORNING, I MET KAKERU
BY THE ENTRANCE.
HE SAID, "ISN'T IT COLD?"
I REPLIED, "YEAH, REALLY."

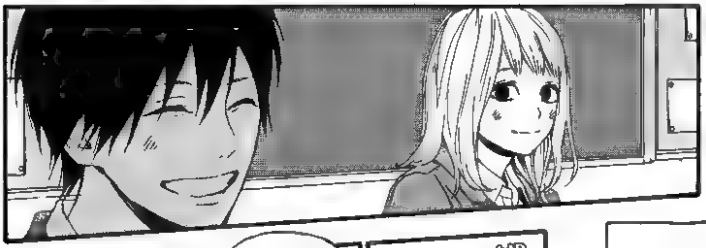
THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I TALKED TO KAKERU.

I HAVE TO MAKE SURE WHAT'S WRITTEN IN THE LETTER FOR TODAY...



...DOESN'T HAPPEN.

I can't see out of these...
KAKERU!
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MY PASSES!
LET'S AIM TO JOIN A PROFESSIONAL TEAM!
Bros to pros!
THIS IS COMING OUT OF THE BLUE...
ALL RIGHT, ENOUGH! YOU ALREADY TOLD ME THAT.
THE SHOTS YOU MADE AT THIS MORNING'S PRACTICE WERE AWESOME!



WHERE'D YOU GET ALL THOSE SNACKS FROM?
AZU AND TAKAKO.
THEY TOLD ME TO EAT 'EM WITH YOU.
FUUUMP
POTATO SNACKS
CHOCOLATE
EVEN THOUGH WE ALL AGREED BEFORE-HAND TO ACT NORMALLY...
...I GUESS IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR US.

EVERYONE'S ACTING KIND OF WEIRD.
HEE HEE
UM... I HAVE...
...SOMETHING TO GIVE YOU, TOO.
WHOA!
I HAVEN'T HAD A NAHO BENTO IN A LONG TIME!
I PUT IN YOUR FAVORITE MASHED POTATOES, TOO.
REALLY?!
THANK YOU!
ACTUALLY...
...KAKERU...

THIS...
YOUR HAIR CLIP?
THIS IS...
...MY TREASURE.
BECAUSE YOU GAVE IT TO ME.

IF I'D BOUGHT IT FOR MYSELF...
...IT WOULDN'T BE A TREASURE.
EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE FOR ME IS A TREASURE, KAKERU.
BUT YOU'RE FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN ANY TREASURE.

I ALSO FORGOT TO TELL YOU THIS.
REMEMBER AT THE ATHLETIC FEST.VAL, THE EVENT WHERE YOU PULLED DOWN THE POLE?
YOU WERE THE COOLEST ONE THERE!
I KNOW YOU WERE EMBARRASSED, BUT YOU WERE COOL RUNNING AROUND HALF-NAKED, TOO!
Slender!
HUH?
...NAHO.
AH...
COME TO THINK OF IT, THERE'S SOMETHING I HAVEN'T REALLY BEEN CLEAR ABOUT WITH YOU.
?
BUT I'M TOUCHED.
THANK YOU.
YOU'RE EMBAR-RASSING ME NOW...
sorry...

I LOVE YOU.

COME ON.
LET'S EAT.
WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING.
I'M JUST SO HAPPY...

BUT SOMETIMES I GET ANXIOUS.

I'M AFRAID OF THE PASSAGE OF TIME.

AZU TOLD ME TO INVITE YOU.
HMM...
SORRY. TODAY DOESN'T WORK FOR ME.
I HAVE TO GO WITH MY GRAND-MA...
...TO THE HOSPITAL.
...I SEE...
WILL KAKERU BE OKAY ON HIS OWN?
NOT AFTER THE DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY.
WE CAN'T PRESSURE HIM TO GO WITH US.
THE ACCIDENT HAPPE-NED...
...AFTER EIGHT O'CLOCK, RIGHT?
YEAH.
flip flip

THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT AFTER 8:00. IT WAS AT AN INTERSECTION NEAR KAKERU'S HOUSE.
APPARENTLY, KAKERU RODE HIS BIKE RIGHT INTO THE PATH OF AN ONCOMING TRUCK.
!
YEAH... LET'S DO THAT!
THEN SHOULD WE WAIT AT THAT INTER-SECTION FOR KAKERU?
THAT'S MEAN!
LET'S DESTROY HIS BICYCLE.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT?

EVEN IF IT TURNS INTO A BORING DAY...

...AND NOTHING SPECIAL HAPPENS.

WE STUDY FOR SIX HOURS, TALK ABOUT NOTHING...

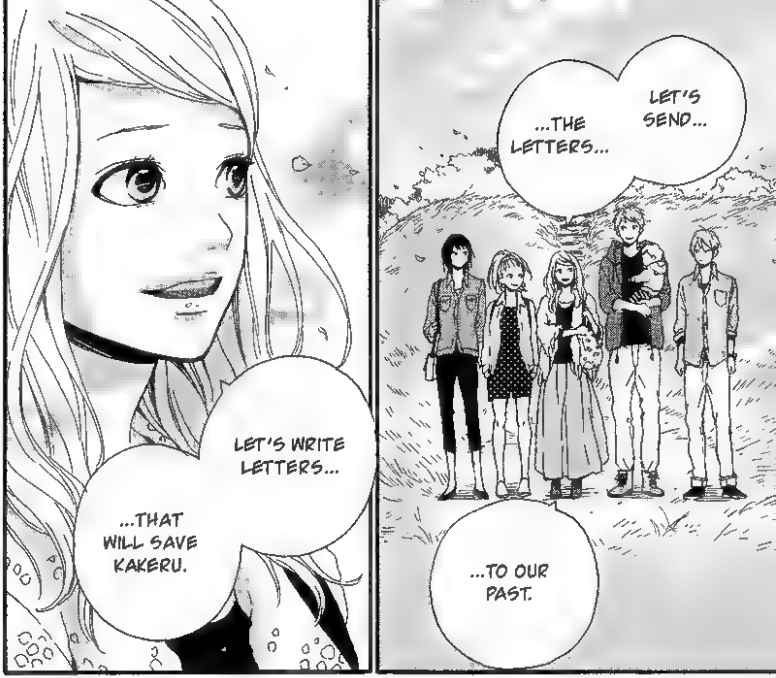
...NEEDS TO BE A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER DAY.

...I'LL HAVE NO COM-PLAINTS.
...WITHOUT ANYTHING MISSING...
...AS LONG AS TOMORROW IS THE SAME...
...CAN'T BE CHANGED.
THE PAST...
...OUR REGRETS CAN'T BE ERASED.
I'M SAYING, EVEN IF OUR LETTERS GET DELIVERED...
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M SAYING.
And don't try to exclude me.
ENOUGH OF YOUR NEGATIVITY. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE, WE WON'T INCLUDE YOUR LETTER, HAGITA.
...HUH?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
ASSUME THERE ARE NO PARALLEL WORLDS AND THIS IS THE ONLY WORLD.
THE LETTERS REACH OUR PAST SELVES...
...WHO MANAGE TO SAVE KAKERU BECAUSE THEY'RE WARNED BEFOREHAND OF HIS DEATH...
...AND THE FUTURE IS PAINTED OVER AS THE "KAKERU DIED" EVENT DISAPPEARS.
...IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THAT?
IF THAT HAPPENED, THERE WOULD BE NO LETTERS TO WARN US OF KAKERU'S DEATH.
THE LETTERS WOULD CEASE TO EXIST THE MOMENT THE "KAKERU DOESN'T DIE" FUTURE COMES INTO BEING...
...AND THE PAINTED-OVER FUTURE WOULD PROBABLY RETURN TO ITS ORIGINAL FORM.

BUT IF THERE ARE PARALLEL WORLDS, A PARADOX WON'T BE FORMED, SO HE COULD BE SAVED, RIGHT?
YOU'RE SAYING KAKERU CAN'T BE SAVED BECAUSE IT WOULD FORM A PARADOX?
OR MAYBE THE LETTERS JUST CAN'T BE SENT BACK INTO THE PAST IN THE FIRST PLACE.
IF A PARALLEL WORLD IS INVOLVED ..
...IT MAY BE POSSIBLE.
...WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO SEE KAKERU AGAIN.
WHETHER THERE'S ONLY ONE WORLD OR PARALLEL WORLDS...
BUT IF OUR LETTERS GET DELIVERED, THEN THAT WORLD WILL SPLIT OFF...
..SO IT'S NOT LIKE WE'D BE CHANGING THE PAST OF OUR WORLD.

LET'S SAVE KAKERU IN A PARALLEL WORLD.
A PARALLEL WORLD.
THEN LET'S GO WITH THAT.
I WANNA DO SOMETHING FOR KAKERU.
JUST FEELING REGRET DOESN'T CHANGE ANYTHING.
LET'S MAKE A WORLD WHERE KAKERU CAN SMILE FOREVER.
YEAH.



BACK THEN...

THAT TIME... THAT MOMENT...

...IF I'D NOTICED WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT TO ME...

...MAYBE KAKERU WOULD BE HERE TODAY.

I'D WANT HIM TO BE THE HAPPIEST BOY IN THE WORLD.
...ALL KIND OF FUN EXPERIENCES.
I'D WANT HIM TO HAVE...
...ONE MORE TIME...
IF I COULD SEE KAKERU...
...WHEN HE WAS LITTLE.
...I'D WANT TO MEET HIM...
...I WANT ONE MORE CHANCE TO SAVE KAKERU.
IF IT'S POSSIBLE...
TICK

GRANDMA...
WHERE ARE MOM'S PHOTOS?
WHAT? WHY DO YOU ASK?
I JUST FEEL LIKE LOOKING AT THEM.
THEY'RE IN THE CLOSET UPSTAIRS, IN THE BACK ROOM.
CLACK
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

STAY AWAY...
KAKERU

AWW...
HE'S SLEEPING.
HE'S HAD A LONG DAY.
YEAH, MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IT A DAY
THE SUN IS SETTING..
AH...

WE DIDN'T CRY...
...BECAUSE THE SUNSET WAS BEAUTIFUL.
WE CRIED BECAUSE KAKERU WASN'T THERE TO SEE IT.
THAT WAS ALL.
IT'S WHAT ALL OF THE LETTERS SAY, SO IT HAS TO BE.
THIS IS WHERE THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED, RIGHT?
COMING.

HE LEFT JUST A LITTLE WHILE AGO...
KAKERU?
...BUT WHY DON'T WE GO TO HIS HOUSE, JUST IN CASE?
IF KAKERU ISN'T THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE ANYMORE, THEN WE'RE GOOD...
...
HE SUDDENLY JUST RAN OUTSIDE, SO I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE WENT...
LET'S LOOK FOR HIM!
WAIT!
HIS BIKE...
...IS RIGHT OVER THERE!

WHY DOESN'T THIS...
...MATCH UP WITH ANYTHING IN THE LETTERS?
WE CHANGED THE FUTURE TOO MUCH.
I WAS AFRAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
BUT IF IT BECAME THE SAME FUTURE AS IN THE LETTER, THERE'D BE NO POINT.

YEAH.
AS LONG AS WE CAN SAVE HIM...
...THERE'S NO PROBLEM.

LET'S SPLIT UP AND SEARCH FOR HIM.
YEAH!

EVEN IF...
...WE SAVE KAKERU FROM THE ACCI-DENT...
...WE HAVEN'T SAVED KAKERU.
...HIS HEART AND MIND.
WE NEED TO SAVE...
HOW DOES HIS FACE LOOK RIGHT NOW?
HELLO! HAGITA?!
WE GOT A SIGHTING FROM A DOG-WALKER
WE SAW A KID WHO SOUNDS LIKE KAKERU ON THE STREET YOU TWO ARE HEADING TOWARDS.
GOT IT.
WE'LL HEAD OVER THERE, TOO
DON'T CRY.

DON'T GO ANYWHERE.
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF.
DID HAGITA?! YOU SEE HIM?
NO.
BUT IT'S PITCH BLACK OUT HERE, SO WE'VE GOT LOUSY VISIBILITY.
RIGHT NOW, WE'RE NEAR NAKAYAMA-SHO.
SAME HERE.
LET'S RENDEZ-VOUS.
PUFF...
PUFF...

!
キキキキキ

KAKERU!
KAKERU OF ANOTHER EARTH...
..I'M SO SORRY I LET YOU DIE!
MY FUTURE SELF DIDN'T TEACH ME WHAT WAS IMPORTANT.
YOU DIE.
SHE ONLY KNEW YOU WERE GONE.
I DIDN'T REALIZE IT ON MY OWN.

THERE'S NO DO-OVER
AFTER SOME-THING HAPPENS...
IT'S THE SAME, EVEN IN THIS WORLD YOU CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST.
KAKERU!!
HEY!

KAKERU!
ARE YOU OKAY?!
WHY DID YOU DO THAT?
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?
ARE YOU HURT?!
IS HE ALL RIGHT?

I THOUGHT I HAD TO APOLOGIZE TO MY MOTHER...
...I WANTED TO DIE.
...BUT...
...I COULDN'T DO IT.
I SUDDENLY BECAME...
...AFRAID TO DIE.

I THOUGHT, IF I DIED, WOULD ALL MY MEMORIES WITH YOU GUYS JUST DISAPPEAR?
THEN I WONDERED WHAT YOU GUYS WOULD THINK IF I DIED.
I THOUGHT...
...MAYBE THERE WOULD BE SOMETHING FUN IN STORE FOR TOMORROW, TOO.

NAHO...
...GAVE ME CHOCOLATE.
I THOUGHT...
...I DIDN'T WANNA DIE...
...JUST YET.
IT WASN'T A WASTE.
HE REALLY DID CHANGE.

BUT...
...WHAT ARE YOU GUYS DOING HERE?
THANK GOOD-NESS...
KAKERU DID CHANGE.
IT WAS...
...IN THE LETTERS.
ALTHOUGH YOU MAY FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE.
...AND THAT WE SHOULD SAVE YOU.
...YOU WERE GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE TONIGHT...
THE LETTERS SAID...
...LETTERS?

TEN YEARS IN THE FUTURE...?
LIKE A RELAYED MESSAGE?
...TEN YEARS IN THE FUTURE.
WE EACH GOT A LETTER FROM OURSELVES...
...YEAH.
AND WE'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO GOT A LETTER FROM THE FUTURE.
AND SUWA, YOU SAID YOU'D SEEN A PHOTO OF ME WHEN I WAS LITTLE...
...SHE SAID SHE HADN'T SHOWN YOU ANY PICTURES.
...BUT WHEN I ASKED MY GRANDMA ABOUT IT...
THE LETTER...
...NAHO HAD TODAY...

THERE ARE LETTERS FOR YOU TOO, KAKERU
I'M SORRY, KAKERU.
I DIDN'T WORRY ABOUT YOU BECAUSE I FIGURED BOYS WERE STRONG.
I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T PROTECT YOU
I WANTED TO HAVE A LOT MORE FUN WITH YOU AND TALK A LOT MORE WITH YOU. BUT I THOUGHT WE HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO DO THAT.
I'M SORRY.

I OFTEN THINK IF I'D DONE THIS OR THAT BACK THEN WOULD YOU STILL BE ALIVE?
WHERE DID I GO WRONG?
I SHOULD HAVE JUST ALWAYS CHOSEN WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME
I'M SORRY.

I NEVER IMAGINED THAT LOSING YOU WOULD BE THIS PAINFUL AND WOULD MAKE ME FEEL THIS LONELY.
I'M SORRY FOR TAKING YOU FOR GRANTED

I'M SORRY I COULDN'T SAVE YOU I WISH I HAD KEPT A CLOSER EYE ON YOU
I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH PAIN YOU WERE IN.

EVEN AFTER TEN YEARS
I'M SURE THEY'LL FEEL IT FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES
...ABOUT LOSING YOU, KAKERU.
THEY ALL FELT TREMENDOUS REGRET...

YES, IT IS!
NO!
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT...
IT'S... MY FAULT?
SO I SWEAR TO GOD, IF YOU DIE, I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!
IT IS YOUR FAULT!
...GUYS...
I'M SORRY...

I'M SORRY, KAKERU...
WE KNEW...
...WHAT HAPPENED ON THE DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY.
EVEN THOUGH IT WAS IN THE LETTERS, WE WEREN'T ABLE TO AVOID IT.
I'M SO SORRY FOR INVITING YOU TO WALK HOME WITH US THAT DAY.
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.
...NO.
I WAS HAPPY YOU ASKED ME TO GO WITH YOU.

THANK YOU...
...FOR BEING MY FRIENDS.
LET'S STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER.
PLEASE...
...DON'T LET THE FUTURE CHANGE.
LET THIS MOMENT, WITH A SMILING KAKERU...
...CONTINUE INTO THE FUTURE.

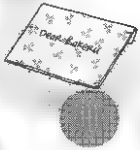
?
IN THE LETTERS, THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS YOU DID.
COME TO THINK OF IT, WHY DIDN'T YOU RIDE YOUR BIKE TONIGHT, KAKERU?
HEY.

IT LOOKED LIKE SOMEONE TRASHED IT ON PURPOSE.
...I WAS GOING TO, BUT THE GEARS WERE MESSED UP.
WELL...

I KNOW WHO THE VANDAL IS...
SOME PEOPLE DO SUCH MEAN THINGS.
WHAT?

HAGITA!

DEAR KAKERU,


Dear Kakeru

DO YOU FORGIVE US?
I WAS STILL A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT THEN,
A CHILD WHO DIDN'T UNDERSTAND PRECIOUS
EVERYDAY THINGS OR THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE.
I'M SORRY I COULDN'T SAVE YOU. I WISH I HAD
KEPT A CLOSER EYE ON YOU.
I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH PAIN
YOU WERE IN.

IF YOU GIVE US ONE MORE CHANCE TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT,
WE'LL DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO PROTECT YOU.
I HOPE YOU WILL FORGIVE US AND LIVE.

APRIL 23, SPRING OF OUR 26TH YEAR
SHALL WE VIEW THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS ON MOUNT
KOBO TOGETHER?

THE SUNSET ON THIS DAY IS SO BEAUTIFUL. THE
VIEW FROM MOUNT KOBO, WITH THE ORANGE-TINTED
SKY, TOWN, AND CHERRY BLOSSOMS... I WANT TO
SEE IT WITH YOU, KAKERU.

WE'RE ALL WAITING FOR YOU.

IT SEEMS I QUIT THE CLUB AFTER YOU DIED.
YEAH.
HUH?
SUWA, YOU'RE NOT PLAYING SOCCER TEN YEARS FROM NOW?
WHO TOLD THEM?!
HAGITA?!
NO! IT WAS OBVIOUS!
...SO DON'T TALK ABOUT TEN YEARS IN THE FUTURE!
WE'RE ABOUT TO BURY A TIME CAPSULE...
DON'T SAY IT!
SORRY... I KNOW IT WAS YOUR DREAM...
BECOMING A SOCCER...
YOU'RE GONNA MEET MESSI, RIGHT?
YOU'RE GONNA BE A PRO SOCCER PLAYER, RIGHT?

SO THERE ARE PARALLEL WORLDS...
...WHICH MEANS...
...THERE ARE FUTURES WHERE ALL KINDS OF THINGS ARE DIFFERENT, RIGHT?
YEAH.
THERE MUST BE A FUTURE SOMEWHERE WHERE AZU AND HAGITA ARE MARRIED.
THERE ISN'T!
THEN...
...THERE'S A FUTURE WHERE SUWA AND NAHO ARE MARRIED TOO, HUH?
NO!
NO, NO, NEVER!
DOESN'T EXIST!
Really?!
Huh?

ALTHOUGH...
...I WISH THERE WERE ONE LIKE THAT.
ME, TOO!
Kakeru Naruse
Put the letters in the can!
LET'S JUST BURY THE DAMN TIME CAPSULE!
NOW HURRY UP!
But he looks happy!
He's embarrassed!

DEAR EVERYONE TEN YEARS IN THE FUTURE.

HOW ARE YOU ALL DOING?

ARE YOU ALL STILL FRIENDS TEN YEARS FROM NOW?

DO YOU STILL LAUGH TOGETHER?

DO YOU HAVE FUN EVERY DAY?

WHAT AM I DOING AT THIS MOMENT. TEN YEARS FROM NOW?

AM I STILL PLAYING SOCCER?

AM I MARRIED TO NAHO?

AM I TRULY ALIVE EVERY SINGLE DAY?

...CRY ALONE AGAIN...

...EVER...

IF YOU...

...THE DAY COMES WHEN YOU FIND JUST LIVING TO BE PAINFUL...

OR EVEN IF...

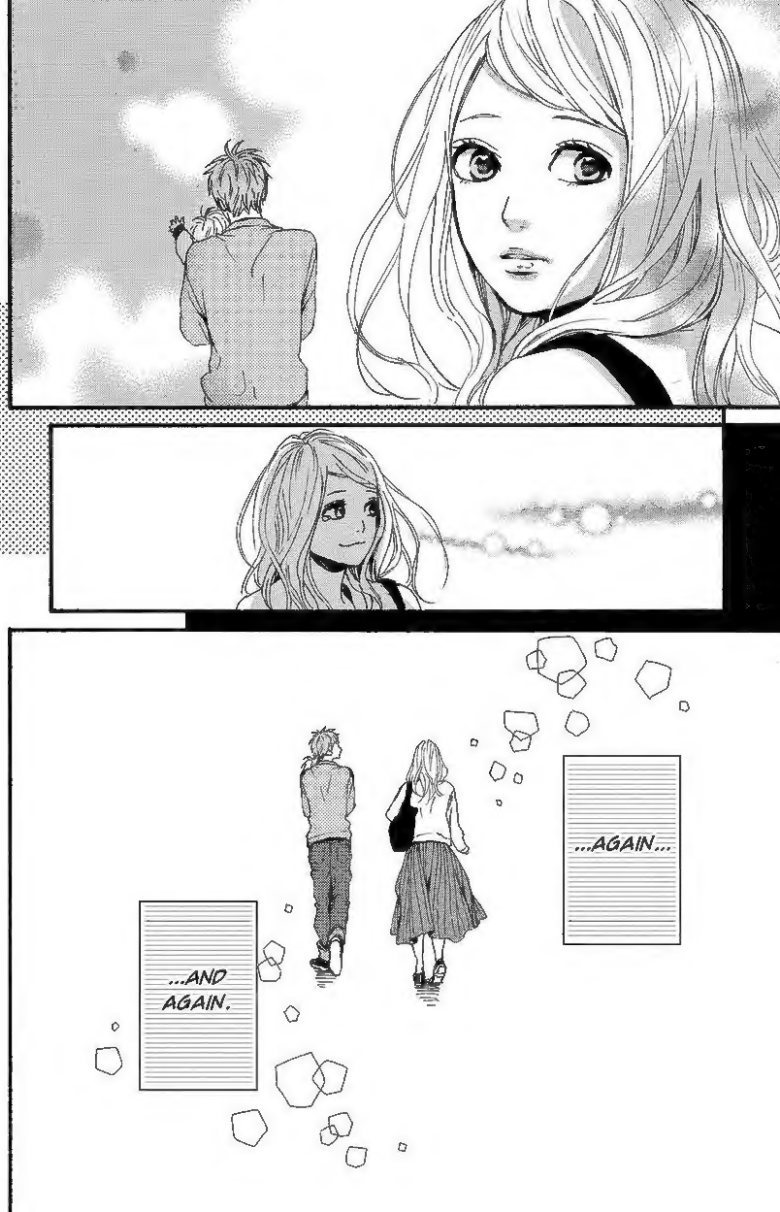
I AM.

YOU LOOK HAPPY ABOUT SOMETHING.

...KAKERU?

WHAT'S WRONG...

...THEN I PROMISE...
...TO BE ALIVE.
I'M GLAD...
THANK YOU...
...FOR SAVING ME.
...I'LL SAVE YOU...


...AGAIN...
...AND AGAIN.